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# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

## THESIS

### FRONTLINE STRATEGIES OF THE NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

by

Jeffery A. Sierpien

March 2006

Thesis Advisor:  
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Nicolas Dew  
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**FRONTLINE STRATEGIES OF THE NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE IN MANAGEMENT**

from the

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research will analyze the comprehensive organizational strategy of the National Rifle Association (NRA). The NRA was dramatically transformed from a gun enthusiasts' group to one of the most powerful organizations in the US starting in the late 1970s. The key focus of the study will be on the political influences and victories the NRA has accomplished in the US over the past 30 years. The research will also focus on NRA senior leadership, NRA members, media sources and US politics as they relate to the current and future strategies of the organization. Furthermore, an in-depth look at the NRA's history will be examined followed by a broad focus on how the NRA has become, and remains, one of the most powerful lobbying organizations in the US. Due to the fluid nature of the NRA, interviews were taken with senior NRA personnel at NRA Headquarters in Fairfax, Virginia, and at the Washington D.C. field office. The positions used for this paper were with the Director of the Grassroots Division and the Director of Federal Affairs. The goal of these interviews was to give this research the most current, up to date information on future goals and trends in the NRA.



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.	The First 100 Years.....	1
2.	Purpose.....	3
3.	Creation of Activism .....	3
4.	Evolution of the New NRA-ILA.....	5
5.	Atmosphere of Change and Challenge.....	8
6.	Continued Growth and Influence.....	10
7.	Losing Focus .....	11
8.	Regaining Lost Momentum.....	11
9.	New Threats and Defeats.....	12
10.	Renewed Strategy.....	12
11.	Current Frontline Strategy .....	14
<b>II.</b>	<b>CURRENT POLITICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>INTERVIEW WITH MR. CAROLINE ON THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND POLITICAL STRATEGY OF THE NRA..</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>INTERVIEW WITH MR. CUNNINGHAM ON THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND POLITICAL STRATEGY OF THE NRA..</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>MEDIA RELATIONS .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>ELITE NEWSPAPERS .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>TELEVISION.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION STRATEGY.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>D.</b>	<b>CURRENT STRATEGY OF THE NRA WITHIN THE MEDIA .....</b>	<b>45</b>
1.	Interview with Mr. Caroline on the Media.....	45
2.	Interview with Mr. Cunningham on the Media .....	48
<b>IV.</b>	<b>DETERMINING NRA STRATEGY .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>GOAL.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>SOURCES.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>TACTICS.....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>D.</b>	<b>IDENTITY.....</b>	<b>54</b>
1.	Women of the NRA .....	55
2.	Youth Programs .....	57
3.	Law Enforcement.....	58
4.	Election Volunteer Coordinators.....	59
5.	Hunter Programs .....	59
6.	Successful Diversification .....	60
<b>E.</b>	<b>RESULTS .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>V.</b>	<b>CASE STUDY .....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>ISSUE.....</b>	<b>65</b>

1.	March 13, 2006 – NRA Headquarters, Fairfax, Virginia.....	66
2.	Creation of the NRA .....	67
a.	<i>The First 100 Years</i> .....	67
3.	Creation of Activism .....	68
B.	TACTICS.....	74
1.	Women of the NRA .....	74
2.	Youth Programs .....	75
3.	Law Enforcement.....	76
4.	Election Volunteer Coordinators.....	76
5.	Hunter Programs .....	77
6.	Successful Diversification .....	77
C.	MEDIA.....	78
D.	FUTURE OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PERSONAL PROTECTION ACT .....	79
E.	CASE STUDY APPENDIX.....	81
	LIST OF REFERENCES .....	87
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....	89

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Harper's Weekly published this cartoon after the NRA victory in New York with the caption "Uncle Sam beats all." .....	2
Figure 2.	"We will never disarm any American who seeks to protect his or her family from fear and harm." — President Ronald Reagan. Pictured with President Reagan is Mr. Carter .....	9
Figure 3.	Alaska Congressman Don Young, who is also an NRA Board member, wades through more than 200,000 postcards received by his House Resources Committee from NRA members protesting abuses by the Clinton-Gore Administration. ....	14
Figure 4.	Displays television news coverage from 1997-1999 (Dickens, 1) .....	43
Figure 5.	The correlation between NRA membership and negative coverage = .654. The relationship test for significance, $F(1, 9) = 5.97$ at the $p = .04$ level, $R^2 = .427$ , adjusted $R^2 = .356$ (Patrick, 135). ....	44
Figure 6.	NRA President Sandra Froman addresses the crowd at the 134 <sup>th</sup> NRA Annual Meeting in Houston. ....	56
Figure 7.	A student with an instructor at a NRA sponsored shooting matches for women. ....	57
Figure 8.	Eddie Eagle pictured with law enforcement official teaching young children what to do if they encounter a firearm. ....	58
Figure 9.	President Bush signing the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act in 2005 .....	61
Figure 10.	Flowchart of NRA Strategy .....	62
Figure 11.	Mr. Smith pondering a strategy. ....	66
Figure 12.	Susan Froman, current NRA President .....	82
Figure 13.	Alaska Congressman Don Young, who is also an NRA Board member, wades through more than 200,000 postcards received by his House Resources Committee from NRA members protesting abuses by the Clinton-Gore Administration. ....	82
Figure 14.	Eddie Eagle Safety Book .....	83
Figure 15.	Eddie Eagle teaching young children about gun safety .....	83
Figure 16.	NRA displays political ambitions .....	84
Figure 17.	NRA Headquarters- Fairfax, Virginia. ....	84
Figure 18.	NRA Strategy Flowchart. ....	85

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## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Fortune Magazine's 2001 "The Washington Power 25" .....	63
Table 2.	Fortune Magazine's 2001 Power 25 .....	81

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

On November 8, 1994, we got the living daylights beat out of us, losing eight Senate races and fifty-four House seats, the largest defeat for our party since 1946. The NRA had a great night. They beat both Speaker Tom Foley and Jack Brooks, two of the ablest members of Congress, who had warned me this would happen. Foley was the first Speaker to be defeated in more than a century. Jack Brooks had supported the NRA for years and had led the fight against the assault weapons ban in the House, but as chairman of the Judiciary Committee he had voted for the overall crime bill even after the ban was put into it. The NRA was an unforgiving master: one strike and you're out. The gun lobby claimed to have defeated nineteen of the twenty-four members on its hit list. They did at least that much damage.... (President William Jefferson Clinton, 629-630)

### **A. BACKGROUND**

Mr. George Wingate and Mr. William Conant started the National Rifle Association (NRA) in 1871. Both men were senior veteran officers of the Union Army during the Civil War. Their personal disgust for the average soldier's marksmanship skills during the war drove them to create an organization that promoted rifle shooting on a scientific basis. Today, the NRA has over four million members. The evolution of the NRA has turned the organization into one of the most powerful lobbying and political organizations within the United States.

#### **1. The First 100 Years**

The NRA started their charter with the promotion of marksmanship and organized shooting matches for training the New York National Guard. The cause quickly interested public officials outside of New York, which gave the NRA the room and support to grow quickly. Soon, other states joined in organizing with the NRA. Various shooting ranges were constructed for the purpose of training and hosting shooting matches.



The Amateur Rifle Club was the first rifle club to be officially affiliated with the NRA. All Amateur Rifle Club members were also NRA members. The Amateur Rifle Club responded to a shooting match invitation by a large and well-established Irish shooting team in 1874. The Amateur Rifle Club had barely over 60 members compared to the thousands of experienced members on the Irish team. With over 8,000 spectators watching in New York, the American team prevailed to victory. The NRA was now widely recognized internationally (Rodengen, 25-28).



Figure 1. Harper's Weekly published this cartoon after the NRA victory in New York with the caption "Uncle Sam beats all."

Throughout the next 100 years, the NRA continued to grow in popularity and shooting competitions soon moved to various universities around the US. Local charters were created and many publications to members became abundant. The NRA also created new programs for youth and women in order to keep membership growing. As a result, membership grew to the tens of thousands. In 1934, the NRA created the Legislative Affairs Division. Even though this division did not officially lobby at this

time, it did keep members informed with newsletters. This allowed members the information to act their own behalf with their local representatives ([www.nrahq.org](http://www.nrahq.org)).

## **2. Purpose**

The purpose of this thesis project is to analyze how the NRA went from an organization solely promoted to marksmanship skills to one of the most influential and powerful lobbying organizations in the U.S. The research for this project will seek to answer the questions: “Why does the NRA have so much more influence over and above other lobbying organizations?” and “How does the NRA activate and mobilize its membership on its behalf with so much fervor?” The particular areas of this research will focus on organizational structure, political influence, membership mobilization and media relations.

## **3. Creation of Activism**

Since 1975, the NRA has been an organization that adapts its managerial strategy to meet the immediate purpose of promoting Second Amendment rights and the activities of American citizens. Many scholars in the past analyzed the NRA as a social organization. However, only recently, many scholars are redefining the NRA as a *social movement* (Melzer, 41). The main difference between the classifications is best described as the difference between looking at the NRA as a gun enthusiasts’— group, versus a powerful political organization determined to elect pro Second Amendment representatives at all levels of government.

In 1975, the NRA began to coordinate an official political strategy into the organization with the creation of the Institute of Legislative Action (ILA) or commonly called NRA-ILA. This newly formed political arm of the NRA was to be wholly independent from NRA Headquarters and would only be responsible to the NRA’s Board of Directors (Rodengen, 165). Harlon Bronson Carter was the first Executive Director of the NRA-ILA. Mr. Carter’s purpose was to communicate the NRA’s concerns directly to federal and subsequent state legislatures. With very limited funds, he was able to create a

staff that would construct such billets as the Head of Federal Affairs, ILA Deputy Director, and Head of the Grassroots Division. This was not an easy task for Mr. Carter or his applicants. He quoted his applicants with the following, “This is not a job I’m offering—it’s an avocation. I want people who would take any loss personally” (Rodengen, 166-167).

Mr. Carter had been part of the NRA organization since 1930, when he joined the NRA at the young age of 16. In 1951, he was elected to the board of directors and served the positions of vice president and president. His straightforward leadership style greatly influenced the organization. He was at times critical of other senior members within the NRA organization feeling that certain senior members lost focus on the NRA’s principal goal: protecting the Second Amendment, versus just protecting recreational activities such as hunting and match shooting. This difference in philosophy within the organization would peak in 1977 at the NRA’s annual meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio (Sugarman, 47).

The first major test in effectiveness of Mr. Carter’s evolving NRA-ILA was almost immediate. In 1975, the NRA-ILA formed a close relationship with U.S. Senator James A. McClure of Idaho. Senator McClure was to serve as the official spokesperson against a bill that would not exempt handgun ammunition under the Hazardous Substances Act. Without the exemption, handgun ammunition sales would be, at best, restricted, or, at the most extreme, outlawed for sale. Skillful lobbying on the part of the NRA-ILA, Senator McClure included a press conference asking all gun owners across the country to write letters to Congress in opposition to such legislation. Mainstream media responded with mostly negative coverage on Senator McClure’s intentions. The results of the press conference and subsequent media coverage caused a reaction that few could have predicted. Some 400 letters were received in support of the proposed ban, while over 300,000 letters were against it. Many of the letters from constituents against the ban also contained anti-ban petitions with thousands of signatures (Rodengen, 168).

The level of grassroots reaction by gun owners and NRA members caused many members of Congress to take immediate notice. The NRA-ILA then began, for the first time, to create mailing lists targeting those particular NRA members who would be most

effective in putting pressure on their Congressional representatives. These mailings had a dramatic effect on those particular members of Congress. The pressure subsequently ended with an overwhelming vote in favor of exempting handgun ammunition from the Hazardous Materials Act. Discouraged with the sudden change in legislation, Senator Ted Kennedy from Massachusetts demanded a floor vote. The vote in the U.S. Senate was 75-11 in favor of exempting the handgun ammunition from the Hazardous Substance Act. The overwhelmingly majority surprised many insiders in Washington as well as the mainstream media. Considered the first major victory of the newly formed NRA-ILA, the vote subsequently defined the NRA-ILA as a political heavyweight among Washington lobbying groups (Rodengen, 168-169).

Armed with the major political victory, the NRA-ILA took further steps, urging NRA members to contact and thank their supporting representatives. The victory gave many in Congress the message that the veritable power of the NRA was not located within NRA Headquarters, but within the hearts and minds of the American public. This action led to other more detailed mailings from the NRA-ILA to its members, targeting any proposed legislation that pertained to Second Amendment issues, not only at the federal level, but also at the state and local level.

The goal of the NRA-ILA was simple. When gun control legislation is proposed within any level of government, NRA members were encouraged to respond with letters and phone calls to their governmental representatives to make their views heard. Furthermore, the political boost in 1975 greatly increased the staff size of the NRA-ILA, which helped facilitate a greater role within the NRA organization. It was the vision of Harlon Carter, some argue, that defined the role of the NRA-ILA through today (Sugarman, 45)

#### **4. Evolution of the New NRA-ILA**

1977 was pivotal year in defining the NRA, its role within American politics, and its future direction. At the annual meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio, often referred to as, “Revolt at Cincinnati,” many members were distraught with the current NRA leadership on many issues. First on the members’ list of concerns was the organization’s leadership

culture of changing its focus away from protecting the Second Amendment to focusing on environmental issues and outdoor recreation. Proposed plans to relocate the NRA Headquarters, from Washington D.C. to Colorado, fueled this perception. Many members were left feeling that the NRA had given up the fight where it was needed the most: at the footsteps of the U.S. government. Furthermore, members felt that there were too many financial and political constraints on the newly formed, but proven effective, NRA-ILA (Sugarman, 47-49).

Because of these events, some members organized to create the *Federation for NRA*. Led by Mr. Neal Knox, a popular editor of various firearm magazines, this independent faction of NRA members created an unprecedented rebellion within the organization. On the night of May 21, 1977, the convention center was nearly taken over by the Federation, distinguished from other NRA members by their orange-colored Federation hats. The meetings that night lasted until nearly 4 a.m. with the Federation members being exceedingly vocal over their concerns. The results of the Federation's rebellion within the NRA organization that night were exceptional in terms of the future NRA staff structure and bylaws (Sugarman, 47-49).

The most notable of these changes included a modification in who determined the powerful position of executive vice president. Before the convention, the Board of Directors determined these positions. Now, they would be determined by voting members. Other modifications included:

- making the protection of the Second Amendment paramount,
- increased funding to the NRA-ILA,
- more member participation in the selection of Board members,
- a reversal on the decision to move NRA Headquarters to Colorado
- a decision that future bylaws could only be changed by a member vote.

Furthermore, with a tremendous political victory still in the minds of many members, and through the cheers of the crowd late that night, Mr. Harlon Carter was elected the NRA's new leader (Sugarman, 50-51).

The effects of Mr. Carter serving as NRA's new leader were almost immediate. Mr. Knox, leader of the Federation *for* NRA, was named head of the NRA-ILA (Rodengen, 188). These changes ensured that the NRA was going to become a "no compromise" organization when it came down to Second Amendment issues. Mr. Carter further changed the organizational strategy of the NRA by focusing on increasing memberships in order to gain greater political advantage in Washington D.C. Through a series of advertising programs that included member incentives and gift giveaways, Mr. Carter was able to achieve 30,000 new memberships a month. In the fall of 1978, *Time* magazine recognized the effectiveness of the NRA by reporting, "The pro-gun lobby, embodied in the National Rifle Association, stands as pluperfect example of the single issue factions. The NRA's traits and methods - passionate, uncompromising zeal combined with keen organization and ruthless skill at pressure tactics - are widely occupied." (Rodengen, 191) Mr. Carter envisioned an NRA so large and strong that it would give any politician pause before infringing on Second Amendment rights. NRA memberships grew from 980,000 in 1977 to 1,900,000 memberships in 1981 (Sugarman, 51-54).

Mr. Carter's tenure also included many changes in the area of public relations and NRA sponsored programs. He felt the need to include the NRA in other areas of American life outside traditional NRA roles. This change was completed by extensive expansion and training of the Field Services Division. The main goals of this branch were:

- promoting NRA programs which included new youth and national shooting matches,
- working with the NRA-ILA to keep members abreast of current political and legislative issues, and
- promoting an unyielding public relations campaign (Rodengen, 197).

Furthermore, Mr. Carter embraced membership activism as the main source of promoting the organization's success. As he was quoted in the NRA's 1978 annual report, "We should never forget that a vital ingredient in the future of the NRA and its success is that we are an organization of participants" (Rodengen, 199).

## **5. Atmosphere of Change and Challenge**

The early 1980s were a time of change and challenge for the NRA. Mr. Carter began to lose faith in Mr. Knox's ability to lead the NRA-ILA. Primarily, Mr. Carter felt that Mr. Knox did not change with the ideals of having a larger membership base for political influence. Therefore, Mr. Knox was replaced by Mr. J. Warren Cassidy, a fellow NRA Director from Massachusetts. The change was painful for Mr. Carter, but he felt that certain threats loomed over the horizon, threats that would require a maximum political effort. The greatest of these threats was a California Bill called *Proposition 15*. The purpose of the proposed proposition was to restrict handgun ownership using a difficult registration process. Mr. Carter felt that, if this proposition were to pass, it could create a greater level of support for the anti-gun lobby (Rodengen, 204).

The NRA's strategy on defeating the bill was immediate and impressive. An estimated 30,000 volunteers were recruited, used in distributing information and making phone calls asking people to vote against Proposition 15. Due to this massive effort, an estimated 250,000 California citizens registered to vote solely based on their opposition to Proposition 15. Furthermore, the NRA sought the help of many public service officials, primarily 95 percent of the state sheriffs, as a public voice opinion against the proposition. Before the NRA began to lobby for its defeat, many media outlets expected that Proposition 15 would pass without any challenge. The end effects of the intense NRA lobbying were larger than anyone could have imagined. The proposition was defeated by a two-to-one margin. The anti-gun lobby had sustained an overwhelming defeat while the NRA had solidified itself, again, as having the political muscle to thwart any large attempt to restrict the Second Amendment (Rodengen, 204).

The 1980s also saw an emergence of more new and diverse public outreach programs offered by the NRA. Most of these programs were directed at the non-traditional members in the hope that the NRA would continue to be proactive in maintaining a positive and more diverse public image. Even more programs and publications were directed to hunters, youth, and women. The effects of these programs allowed the NRA to access other non-traditional venues for membership (Rodengen, 208). Furthermore, these new programs allowed for NRA sponsorship of more national

and local sporting and shooting events as well as the placement of print advertisements in non-shooting publications. The NRA also sought the support of famous people within the “I’m the NRA” program. Such members of this program included former astronaut Wally Schirra and several actors, including Roy Rogers. This program allowed members to display with pride their affiliation with the NRA (Rodengen, 206).

In 1985, after 35 years of service, Mr. Carter retired from the NRA. His departure came under his own decision and without any reservation. There is little dispute that his guidance entirely changed the NRA’s direction, from a social organization to a powerful geo-political social movement. By serving the interests of NRA members, and through an aggressive advertisement campaign, he was able to swell membership from under 1 million members to well over 3 million. Furthermore, the amount of political success that the NRA had obtained since 1977 was remarkable and served as a testament to his “no compromise” leadership style and remarkable vision. Due to his lifelong efforts, Mr. Carter was given the NRA’s most prestigious tribute, Honorary Life Member Status (Rodengen, 210-211). This however, was not the end of Mr. Carter and the NRA.



Figure 2. "We will never disarm any American who seeks to protect his or her family from fear and harm." — President Ronald Reagan. Pictured with President Reagan is Mr. Carter



## **6. Continued Growth and Influence**

As NRA political victories continued to grow, so did the NRA's influence. In 1986, through the support of a few strong and influential supporters in Congress, the NRA was able to get the McClure-Volkner Firearms Owners Protection Act passed. The act had been seven years in the making. However, since anti-gun legislators controlled the leadership in the powerful House Judiciary Committee, the bill was never brought up to a floor vote. With the help of an intensive lobbying effort by the NRA-ILA, the U.S. Senate was able to bypass the Judiciary Committee, by using a discharge petition. The petition allowed the bill to be bypassed by the Judiciary Committee and brought up for a full floor vote. Within the House of Representatives, 218 members voted for the petition, enough for a floor vote. The floor vote was 292–130 in favor of the bill, an overwhelming landmark victory for the NRA. This was only the eighth time since 1960 that a petition was successfully enacted in Congress. “The McClure-Volkner Law was undoubtedly ILA's finest moment,” said James O. E. Norrel, NRA-ILA's first communications director (Rodengen 219-220).

Response to the McClure-Volkner Firearms Owners Protection Act was immediate and profound. It gave pro-gun state legislatures the momentum to enact other forms of pro-gun legislation at many state levels. The trend was certain, consistent, and real. The NRA was soundly imbedded into the very fabric of American politics at all levels of government. The passage, however, did not come without a fight in other areas of the public discourse. Many city police departments were against the ban; some joined forces with anti-gun groups. This was a change for the NRA, which had enjoyed the overwhelmingly support of many police agencies, and they challenged these specific officers with the full force of their political strength. Jerald Vaughn, a 20-year police veteran and executive director of a prominent police organization, decided to work with Handgun Control Inc, an anti-gun lobbying group (Sugarman, 62). Officer Vaughn describes his experiences:

I was identified by the NRA for a period of time as public enemy number one. Along with that came a certain amount of hate mail and controversy. The tactics, the vindictiveness, the resources mustered against anyone who dares speak against them...no other group can compare to the NRA (Sugarman, 62).

## **7. Losing Focus**

The early 1990s were a difficult and challenging time for the NRA. With a series of highly publicized fatal shootings and the negative media coverage that followed, the NRA sustained a series of public relation blows. To add to the growing problems, many members felt that the current leadership was losing focus and, more importantly, its foothold in American mainstream politics. As a result, membership was declining quickly. In addition, a series of financial blunders left the organization short on funds. This series of problems led to internal disputes at the most senior levels. Although retired, Mr. Carter returned to Washington D.C. to aid in turning around the organization. The result was the removal of Mr. Warren J. Cassidy, NRA's executive vice president (Rodengen, 236-237). In 1991, members elected Mr. Wayne LaPierre as the new executive vice president of the NRA. Mr. LaPierre's newly acquired position was often credited to the efforts of Mr. Carter and a few powerful congressmen, and he remains in this powerful position today (Rodengen, 237).

## **8. Regaining Lost Momentum**

The positive effects of Mr. LaPierre's appointment were almost instantaneous. His vision for the organization was quite dissimilar from what had sent the NRA into a downward spiraling trend. In short, Mr. LaPierre's leadership and dedication inspired a sense of urgency within the organization. With the help of experts in the areas of communication, data processing, and marketing, he designed a membership task force that helped initiate new advertising programs. Within the first nine months of 1992, membership rose by over half a million and total membership was over the 3 million mark (Rodengen, 239-240). Mr. LaPierre's early tenure also included the moving of

NRA headquarters from Washington D.C. to Fairfax, Virginia. The move increased operating space and saved the NRA over \$1 million a year in operation expenses (Rodengen, 243).

## **9. New Threats and Defeats**

With the election of William Jefferson Clinton to become the 42<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States in 1992, the NRA had a new challenge on the horizon. President Clinton quickly supported anti-gun lobbying groups from the very beginning of his first year as President (Rodengen, 248). The most prominent of these anti-gun lobbying groups was Handgun Control Inc., chaired by Sarah Brady, wife of Jim Brady. Mr. Brady served as a White House Press Secretary for President Ronald Reagan and was severely wounded during John Hinckley's assassination attempt on President Reagan on March 30, 1981 ([www.bradycampaign.org](http://www.bradycampaign.org)).

Mrs. Brady, with the help of Mr. Brady, was an effective leader for Handgun Control Inc. The organization sought to impose large restrictions on many different types of firearms. Intense lobbying on the part of Handgun Control Inc. ensued after the election of President Clinton, especially since they thought there was a friendly anti-gun President in the White House. The largest piece of legislation pushed by Handgun Control Inc. was the Brady Bill, named after Mr. Brady. The intense lobbying efforts by Handgun Control Inc. resulted in the passage of the Brady Bill on November 30, 1993. Subsequently signed into law by President Clinton, this was the first large occurrence of anti-firearm legislation passed into law since 1968 ([www.saf.org](http://www.saf.org)). The NRA viewed the passage as a sounding defeat. While the Brady Bill had been debated on the floor in Congress since 1987, intense NRA lobbying efforts, and political divide between proponents and opponents had stalled its passage year after year.

## **10. Renewed Strategy**

In response to the passage of the Brady Bill, the NRA began to restructure its organizational strategy, hoping to dispel the merits of the Brady Bill. The NRA tried to purchase airtime to present a commercial that outlined criminals, not firearms, as the real

reason for violent crime in the U.S. Major media outlets, like CBS, refused to show such a commercial, stating that it was their decision not to air such material. The NRA had felt that there was a media bias before, but this brought it to a completely new level (Rodengen, 249). The NRA began to reenergize the grass roots efforts of its membership. Mr. LaPierre pronounced, “You are going to see a revolution,” referring to the upcoming national elections in November of 1994. NRA President, Mr. Thomas L. Washington, was quoted in 1994:

After winning their Brady Bill waiting period and recent bans on semi-automatic magazines, the anti-gun lobby is telling politicians that gun owners are no longer a threat. They claim you don’t care enough about your rights to vote, so politicians shouldn’t care about the Second Amendment. And if you don’t prove them wrong November 8, rest assured that’s all you have left” (Rodengen, 251).

Due to the extreme loss on the Brady Bill, the NRA refocused all of its efforts into changing the political landscape with the upcoming 1994 national elections. The entire organization renewed its energy, trying to reach as many members and gun owners as possible. Despite a massive grass roots effort, very few major media outlets reported on it. The efforts of the NRA were unnoticed outside the organization and other like-minded gun lobbying groups. Mr. LaPierre also released his book, *Crime, Guns and Freedom*, which addressed every debate over the Brady Bill. The book quickly made the New York Times bestseller list (Rodengen, 252).

Prior to the 1994 election, the NRA compiled a list of twenty-four Congressional members that, they decided, should be removed from office because of their vote concerning the Brady Bill. The results of the November 8, 1994, elections were unforeseen by even the most experienced of political pundits within Washington D.C. Nineteen of those twenty-four selected Congressional members were defeated that night (Clinton, 629-630). This was an astounding number of incumbents to lose in a single election. Never before in U.S. history, has a lobbying group affected the outcome of a National election more than the NRA did in November of 1994. As reported by *The Hill*, a Washington D.C. political publication, “As candidates who backed gun control legislation fell one by one across the nation Tuesday night, the National Rifle Association

re-emerged as a high-caliber force that politicians cross at their own peril.” *The Washington Post* reported, “After suffering big defeats in Congress this year on handgun control and a ban on certain assault weapons, the National Rifle Association made good on its promise not to get mad, but to get even.” (Rodengen, 253).

Throughout the late 1990s, the NRA continued to be one of the most influential political organizations in the U.S. Its influence on national and state elections was never again seriously questioned after the 1994 election outcome. Membership did fall for a short time after a dues increase for members, along with some short internal power struggles within the Board of Directors. However, the organization remained a stable force within American politics. In 2001, the NRA achieved the top spot in *Fortune Magazine’s*, “Power 25.” This list names the most powerful and influential lobbying groups in the U.S. (Rodengen, 265).



Figure 3. Alaska Congressman Don Young, who is also an NRA Board member, wades through more than 200,000 postcards received by his House Resources Committee from NRA members protesting abuses by the Clinton-Gore Administration.

## **11. Current Frontline Strategy**

To accurately access the current strategic atmosphere within the NRA, interviews were taken with NRA senior officials in December 2005 and January 2006. These

interviews were conducted from NRA Headquarters in Fairfax, Virginia, as well as at the NRA's Field Office in Washington D.C. The interviews sought up-to-date information on current grass roots efforts and political strategies within the NRA. The individuals chosen for the interviews were based on their importance and relevance to the grass roots efforts and political activism within the NRA. The two positions chosen were the Director of the Grassroots Division and the Director of Federal Affairs. The contents of these interviews are found throughout the next three chapters, as well as in the case study appendix at the conclusion of this paper.

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## **II. CURRENT POLITICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY**

The first interview was with Glen A. Caroline on December 1, 2005, at NRA Headquarters in Fairfax, Virginia. Mr. Caroline holds the position as Director of the Grassroots Division for the NRA-ILA. Mr. Caroline is responsible for the NRA's political and legislative grassroots programs at the national, state and local levels. Furthermore, Mr. Caroline is the editor of the NRA's monthly newsletters "Freedom's Voice" and the "The EVC Update," as well as the weekly "Grassroots Alert". Mr. Caroline's detailed responsibilities include:

- recruiting, training and mobilization of over 320 Election Volunteer Coordinators (EVCs),
- coordinating political training workshops for members,
- serving as a NRA representative in debates and public forums on the issues of gun control and grassroots mobilization,
- serving as NRA representative spokesperson in various media outlets concerning NRA's grassroots activities,
- serving as a featured lecturer at a number of national political seminars (Institute For Legislative Action, Biography, Glen A. Caroline, Director, Grassroots Division).

Furthermore, Mr. Caroline, in 1998, was named on one of *Campaigns and Elections* "Rising Stars of Politics." Mr. Caroline holds a Bachelors Degree in Political Science with a Certificate in International Relations from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Mr. Caroline also serves as a NRA Certified Basic Pistol Instructor and is an Endowment Member of the NRA (Institute for Legislative Action, Biography, Glen A. Caroline, Director, Grassroots Division).

The second interview conducted was with Charles H. Cunningham on January 24, 2006. Mr. Cunningham serves as the Director of Federal Affairs for the NRA, where he has had that position since 1999. Mr. Cunningham's responsibilities include managing the NRA's Washington D.C. field office and coordinating the NRA's Political Action Committee on Capitol Hill. Mr. Cunningham previously worked for the NRA from 1984



to 1994. During that time Mr. Cunningham served initially as a State Liaison handling nine states and then moved up to the position of Deputy Director of State and Local Affairs (Institute for Legislative Action, Biography, Charles H. Cunningham, Director, Federal Affairs).

From January 1994 to March of 1999, Mr. Cunningham worked for the Christian Coalition serving as Director of National Operations as well as Director of Voter Education. As Director of National Operations, Mr. Cunningham coordinated the activities of the Christian Coalition fifty state affiliates, which include 1,500 local chapters. Furthermore, Mr. Cunningham directed overall voter guide information which efforts produced over 150 million guides to Christian coalition members. In 1996, Mr. Cunningham managed the Christian Coalition delegation project for the 1996 Republican National Convention (Institute for Legislative Action, Biography, Charles H. Cunningham, Director, Federal Affairs).

- Mr. Cunningham has worked effectively in several political causes and campaigns at both the state and federal offices. Through these diligent efforts, Mr. Cunningham has accomplished many professional milestones. These include:
- honored as the first recipient of the Ronald Reagan Award for grassroots activism at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference,
- appointed by Virginia Governor George Allen to the Board of Visitors for James Madison University in 1995 and then reappointed by Governor Jim Gilmore,
- appointed by Virginia Governor George Allen to the Board of the Virginia Department of Game and inland Fisheries in 1994 and then reappointed by Governor Jim Gilmore,
- listed among the top twenty non-profit/grassroots lobbyists on Capitol Hill according to March 31, 2004 issue of The Hill, a Washington D.C. political publication,
- recognized by Roll Call in its January 26, 1998 issue as one of the nations fifty most influential and effective political operatives,
- was described as a “mover and shaker” in the December/January 1997 issue of Campaigns and Elections,
- served on the 72-hour Task Force for the Republican National Committee,

- has been elected a delegate or alternate to the Republican National Convention in 1980, 1992, 1996, 2000 and 2004,
- served on the Advisory Committee of the American Council of Alumni Trustees,
- served as a board member for the National Advisory Board for the Recreational Fishing Alliance,
- served as a board member for the American Legion Boys State of Virginia and the Family Foundation of Virginia (Institute for Legislative Action, Biography, Charles H. Cunningham, Director, Federal Affairs).

These interviews are broken into three separate and distinct areas. Those areas included: 1. Political and organizational strategy, 2. Current NRA membership 3. Media relations. The goals of these interviews were to:

- gain the most current insight on NRA strategies at the grassroots and political level,
- compare those strategies from those used in the past, particularly since 1977,
- help distinguish where those strategies are leading the NRA into the future.

#### **A. INTERVIEW WITH MR. CAROLINE ON THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND POLITICAL STRATEGY OF THE NRA**

Interviewer – I am here in Fairfax Virginia speaking with Mr. Glen Caroline, Executive Director of the Grassroots Division of the NRA

Interviewer – Sir, how are you?

Mr. Caroline – I am doing well, but you gave me too much credit. My title is just Director of the Grass Roots Division.

Interviewer – I stand corrected.

Mr. Caroline – That's quite all right. (Laughing)

Interviewer – Sir, could you give me a description of your title, your position here at the NRA?

Mr. Caroline - As the Director of the Grass Roots Division, my main goal is to educate and empower NRA members to assist the association on advancing and defeating legislation at the federal state and local level, and electing and defeating candidates at the federal state and local levels. Our main goal or strategy is to make sure that the NRA members and gun owners that we interface with and recruit understands the issues that are paramount and important to the NRA, and then get some kind of fundamental training to make sure, that they can effectively work as grassroots activists in their community to advance our agenda.

Interviewer – I would like to talk now about the organizational political strategies of the NRA.

Interviewer – In your opinion what purpose does the NRA serve?

Mr. Caroline – The NRA was founded in 1871 primarily to serve as marksmanship and firearm training and the organization still does a vast majority of that. The NRA offers most of the firearms training across the country or NRA trained instructors. Most of the people who work in this building (NRA Headquarters) are not necessarily linked to the political and legislative operation but rather some of the programmatic operations. However, I think if you survey the average American and ask them what the NRA is known for? It is probably the legislative and political prowess. Therefore, the Institute for Legislative Action (ILA), which is the lobbying of the NRA, is only one department in this vast corporation. A lot of the notoriety that we get throughout America is driven because people are familiar with our work in Congress and state legislatures to advance the rights of law-abiding gun owners and our activism during election times.

Therefore, we still do many of the primary missions of competitions, the trainings, the education, but I think most Americans are familiar with the NRA through our legislative and political prowess.

Interviewer – What is the NRA’s greatest strength?

Mr. Caroline – I think that without question our greatest strength is the deep and wide support we have from our membership and gun owners in general.

Interviewer – What is the greatest weakness?

Mr. Caroline – I do not know if I would call it a weakness as much as I would call it a challenge. However, one of the major challenges we face is a very bias new media that to be kind “under reports” the NRA’s position, but more often than not flat out misrepresents the NRA or ignores it all together. Therefore, it makes it difficult to educate and get through to the average member of the public that is not familiar with the NRA position of gun control since most of the information they get is through the national media that is very bias against our issue.

Interviewer – What do you think the greatest opportunity the NRA has right now today?

Mr. Caroline - That would be hard to pinpoint because we have so many different areas that we have opportunities in but just speaking generically I think we have the opportunity to continue to grow and expand upon our basis of support and our operations. We have enjoyed tremendous success over the past decade or so, legislative and politically. One of the challenges we now face in addition to breaking through the national media is a lot of our folks feel as though the war is over, since we have won so many legislative battles and done so well in elections that the NRA has taken care of everything and the fight is over. Therefore, we need to overcome that complacency which is a challenge. For the same reason, I see that as an opportunity because we now

have the opportunity to re-educate our supporters to show them that the fight to protect freedom is an on-going battle, that is never going to end and things good or bad. We always have to continue to do better, and do more to ensure that the rights we seek to protect are maintained for our generation and future generations.

Interviewer – What is the greatest threat within the NRA?

Mr. Caroline – I think that I would get back to complacency. That is something that organizations such as ours always have to guard against. We have a backwards business model here at NRA, in the sense that when things are bad we are under attack all the time or we are losing. Our membership really rises to the occasion to fight back, they contribute the funds, and they rejoin as members, they get involved in grass roots activities across the country. Yet when things tend to look good, or we enjoy a lot of success, they can sometimes sit back on their heels and think all the work I have done up to this point is giving me time now where I can take a break and there is a respite. The complacency thing to always stress to our members that the next election is just around the corner, the next opportunity for our opponents to further diminish away our rights is just around the corner, is something that is an on-going daily challenge. To keep the energy up and to keep the folks sustained to ensure continued momentum and continued success.

Interviewer – What makes the NRA different from other pro-gun Second Amendment lobbying groups?

Mr. Caroline – I think one of the major differences is, is the size of support we have. We are about 4 million members, which dwarfs many other organizations much less gun owner organizations. I think the reason the NRA is so much larger to other organizations is that we have proven that we are sort of the primary and best organizations out there to defend the rights of law abiding gun owners and we are so established and have been doing this for so long that our record of accomplishment speaks for itself. Because we

have been successful that is why, most gun owners tend to gravitate towards the NRA when they actually want to join an organization to defend their rights.

Interviewer – Has the NRA's strategy changed over time? I know you said it has been around for over a hundred years, but in terms of the strategy has the NRA's strategy changed in the last 5 or 10 years? What triggers change, if one is needed?

Mr. Caroline – It is a little bit of both. The ultimate goal is always the same. Speaking from a legislative, excuse me a political standpoint, we are here to advance the rights of gun owners and to protect the rights of gun owners. However, if you look back, and I will be giving a speech up in Canada in fact this Saturday night about this. If you look back, over the last ten years or the last dozen years, we have really transitioned and our strategies have transitioned where as, when Bill Clinton was in office and the Democrats had control over Congress for so long, a lot of our strategy was defeating attacks on our rights. Bills would be introduced that we would have to beat back. By working and intervening within the election cycles over the last decade or so. What we done is to strive to pick up pro Second Amendment seats in both the House and the Senate and flip control from an anti-gun Democratic leadership to a pro-gun Republican leadership – and I will side track for a moment. We are a non-partisan organization. We do not basis our decisions of who to support based on their party affiliation. However, the fact of the matter is that the leaders of the Democratic Party leadership tend to be much more anti-gun than the leadership of the Republican leadership tends to be more pro-gun. So with the strives we have made in getting friendlier bodies in Washington D.C., the strategy is now transitioned more away from always having to be in the defensive and now taking some proactive steps to introduce legislation and pass into law statutes that will protect the firm and uphold the rights of law abiding gun owners. So, while we always have to be eternally vigilant and on guard to defeat attacks on our rights, we also have had far more opportunities in the past 10 or 12 years at the state and federal level to actually advance a pro-active and pro-gun agenda.

Interviewer – How do you measure success in the NRA?

Mr. Caroline – Well, I guess there are a number of ways to look at how many members we have or how much money we are raising but, I think by and large that we look to the barometer of success is how many good bills do we pass how many bad bills do we defeat. How many good politicians we elect to office in all levels of government in election year and how many bad incumbents do we defeat in any given election year. It is very quantifiable. You have priorities as to what you hope to achieve legislatively and politically, and at the end of a legislative session and election cycle you just tally up the wins and losses and you can get a pretty good understanding as to how you did and where you stand.

Interviewer – In your opinion how influential, is the NRA in American Politics?

Mr. Caroline – That is a very good and pointed question. I will direct your attention right now to one particular item. Not on a regular basis, but a few times over the last four or five years, Fortune Magazine and some other publications have done various surveys to try and gauge which lobbying organizations are most effective. Fortune Magazine, which you may be familiar with, they ran a survey on a semi regular basis called the “Power 25.” Which basically surveys executive and administration officials, Congressmen, Senators and their staff, political pundits other political professionals to try and rank just like they do to college football or college basketball rankings 1 – 25 most effective organizations in America. The first couple few surveys that came out the NRA was very highly placed, but the AARP always occupied the number one slot. The most recent survey that Fortune Magazine did which I believe came out in 2001 – which was the last one they did. For the first time ever in these rankings, an organization other than the AARP occupied the top slot. It was the NRA. So as we sit here today we are – I guess the reigning national champions as it comes to lobbying organizations, so I don’t think this is necessarily just a question of you asking an NRA employee how he or she feels the

NRA does. I think if you look at the opinions of many political observers and elected officials most will conclude that NRA is the most effective political organization in America.

Interviewer – On the national level, the NRA gets a lot of publicity. What about the state and local levels? Can you elaborate more on what the NRA does on the state and local levels?

Mr. Caroline –Yes, it is many of the same things. We have the structure of the Institute for Legislative Action; which is the lobbying arm of the NRA. We have two separate divisions. The Federal Affairs Division and the other is or State and Local Affairs Division. Federal Affairs Division are a professional team of Washington lobbyists here in the District of Columbia that are responsible for lobbying members of Congress and evaluate candidates who are running for office. Their counterparts on the State and Local level do the same thing. They work on the state and local level to pass and defeat laws on the state level and work to evaluate and make recommendations on candidates running for elections. We have had extremely good success and probably many more quantifiable successes at the state and local levels than at the federal level. If for no other reason than there are fifty state legislatures that offer us an opportunity as opposed to only one national body in the form of the United States Congress. Nevertheless, we have passed scores of program legislation on the state level. Everything from laws prohibiting lawsuits against the gun industry, from acts of criminals that use guns, to laws that allow citizens to get permits to carry concealed firearms. Furthermore, laws for self-defense, to laws on the State Level that pre-empt localities from passing their own patchwork quilt of gun control laws. We also monitor state constitutional protections to keep and bear arms as well as range protection laws that prohibit ranges from being politically targeted because of noise ordinances. So you do not read about them in large national papers but if you have, the ability to scour the state and local newspapers you would see that NRA's influence on the state level is an equally potent, if not more than on the federal level.



Interviewer – I know you have already stated that the NRA does not favor one political party over another, but a Mr. Chris Cox, Director of the ILA said, “During the 2004 election that he was going to expose Democrats who acted as there were pro-gun,” but in the NRA’s view were not. For example, Senator John Kerry’s ad, “That Dog Don’t Hunt”. How effective do you those campaign ads worked in 2004 elections?

Mr. Caroline – I think it was extremely effective and extremely brilliant, because if you think back to that campaign as a political strategy, it probably made sense, but it did not pass the “strait face test.” When John Kerry was trying to suggest to voters that he was a champion of the Second Amendment in which he was a hunter and an outdoorsman. If you had looked at his record, he had cast more than 50 documented anti-gun votes as a US Senator. He realized based on the 2000 elections and even elections prior to that, candidates who run as outwardly anti-gun do not win elections. Therefore, what he tried to do was camouflage his record, to run from that record and say, “I support the rights of the Second Amendment supporters.” Early on in the campaign most of our, not most but a lot of gun owners who were unfamiliar of John Kerry who hadn’t heard of him, who didn’t know about his record, saw this guy jet-setting across the country talking about “I support the Second Amendment.” In addition, they saw photo ops of him in Ohio coming out of a field with a goose and a shotgun over his shoulder and he was photographed in camouflage at a shooting range. Therefore, that created an impression to the uneducated voter on John Kerry, that he would be sympathetic to our cause. So, we had to work tirelessly to expose to the gun owning electorate out there that what this guy says in his photo ops does not match the records he had in Congress over the past 20 years. So that education campaign was critical to our success because once gun owners got to know the real John Kerry they see right through the scam of his campaign as to try and portray himself as something other than he really is.

Interviewer – Do you think that the NRA can affect the outcome of elections with a Republican majority now?

Mr. Caroline – As I said earlier, it is much more difficult to motivate people to preserve what they already have or to expand upon what they currently have than it is to motivate them for fear they are going to lose something they already have. Therefore, it is a different climate now and has been for some time and it is more of a challenge. But I still think that the NRA and the NRA members are extremely important voting block and activist block that most candidates whom we support are going to want to carry our support at not only the voting box but in months leading up to the elections. Therefore, it is not a question if we still think it is important because we know that we have to be able to communicate to our members, get them involved in politics, but the dynamics are different now. It can be a little bit more difficult to motivate them because we have had so much success in these recent years.

Interviewer – What current legislation has the greatest concern to the NRA, either positive or negative?

Mr. Caroline – Well that Protection of Lawful Commerce and Arms Act was a very high priority for us for the past five to seven years. Therefore, the culmination of that being signed into law by President Bush was an extremely monumental achievement for NRA members and gun owners across the country. Nevertheless, as you know being in the Marines – once one battle is over you shift your focus to the next battle that looms in the horizon. Right now, a lot of our top legislation in the US Congress is to appeal the 1976 Washington DC handgun ban. The District of Columbia has had a ban on handguns for the better part of 30 years, and I do not think it is a secret that it has been an abysmal failure at controlling crime. Washington DC is the murder capital of the country. Because of the way the District government is structured and the flexibility, that Congress has given it to pass laws that negatively affect the District of Columbia. We are currently working in the US House and Senate to get legislation to overturn that ban to allow citizens of the District of Columbia to again, be able to choose whether to own a firearm.

Interviewer – Since there has been a Republican majority, how satisfied are you with the progress of either passing or not passing of laws that pertain to the Second Amendment?

Mr. Caroline – I think we should get away from the terminology of Republican majority because while the leadership of the Republican Party is more sympathetic to the rights of gun owners than the Democratic Leadership, I prefer to refer to it as pro-gun majority. This is especially true in US House of Representatives. There is a significant block of pro-gun Democrats that without which we would not be able to pass anything. We really need these pro-gun Democrats. On any given issue, the Republicans are not all marching in lock step on pro-gun control anymore than the Democrats do. So, that we are certainly pleased with a whole host of victories on the state level that I talked about, passing of this lawsuit bill was a crowning jewel. I do not think we can ever become satisfied. Because once you become satisfied, you become content and then you start to loose your edge and you start to position yourself to where you could get softer and could suffer some victories. We are never going to be satisfied. I think that it would be an accurate statement to say that since 1994 when control of Congress flipped hands we have been in a much better position in dealing with Congress. We are able to defeat bad bills and pass good bills more now then a decade before when Democrats controlled the White House. In addition, certainly with the election of President Bush, who we endorsed along with his re-election, we have certainly had a more sympathetic ear with that White House and Administration being able to bring up concerns and working with them through executive acts and or getting their support for Congressional action then we ever did with Bill Clinton. However, then again I do not think we will ever be 100% satisfied because we are always going to want to do even more for the rights of law-abiding gun owners.

Interviewer – Are there any glowing disappointments?

Mr. Caroline – There are always disappointments and I do not think I could go through and cherry pick specific lawmakers or candidates with whom we are disappointed. One that does jump out at us very often is Senator John McCain from Arizona who from very early on in his career and even up until recent years was a very iron supporter of the

rights of law-abiding citizens. Now on the gun issue and many other issues that conservatives look upon with favor, he sort of has done a 180 and is now marrying up with people who are very hostile to the rights of gun owners. He leads the charge on this so called Campaign Finance Reform Law, which has an extremely detrimental effect on NRA's ability to participate in the political process right up until the poles close up on Election Day. Therefore, he is certainly somebody who certainly started out a much more pro-gun legislator than he is today. Currently and there are other examples like that as well, but by and large I think most people if you track their records, follow what they do and say.

Interviewer – How satisfied are you with George Bush as President?

Mr. Caroline – Clearly, you have to be pleased when the President comes out, supports your top legislative priorities, and signs it into law. The best way to answer that question is compare with what we have had with six years with George Bush verses eight years with Bill Clinton. Bill Clinton took every opportunity he had to attack the NRA. He was pushing and promoting gun control laws. George Bush has not been promoting gun control laws, in fact has been working with us to help remedy and rectify and overturn some of the things that Bill Clinton did. Therefore, it has certainly been a marked improvement. There are other agenda items that we would like to keep on and to get accomplished while we have the Presidential support. Therefore, we are never going to be content or satisfied because we are always reaching further and trying to improve upon our operations and make our lives and those of gun owners better. However, comparing what we had before, President Clinton to what we have now really has been night and day.

Interviewer – Who are the NRA's strongest supporters currently in Congress? Who are the weakest?

Mr. Caroline – We have so many on either side. Senator Craig from Idaho is certainly a champion for our Second Amendment rights. He is a Republican. Senator Craig who is now on the NRA's Board of Directors is a very strong advocate of our rights. Pretty much the entire House Republican leadership team is good with our issues and helpful in steering our issues through the House. And on the other side the people who pretty much jump out at me as being public enemies numbers one through six are the Hilary Clintons, the Diane Feinsteins', the Barbara Boxers', the Chuck Schumers' and the Dick Durbins' of the world. Oh, Nancy Pelosi, she is a very shrill advocate for more gun control as well. When you get down into the regular members, there are Republicans who support gun control and there are Democrats who oppose gun control. Nevertheless, again if you look at the leadership of the House and the Senate on the Democrats and Republicans side, it may not be to a man or a woman, but the Republican leadership are all very sympathetic to the rights of gun owners. The Democratic Leadership almost to a person is all very hostile to the rights of gun owners.

Interviewer – All right Sir, I think that pretty much wraps up the organizational and political section of this interview.

**B. INTERVIEW WITH MR. CUNNINGHAM ON THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND POLITICAL STRATEGY OF THE NRA**

Interviewer – What is your title in the organization?

Mr. Cunningham - Director of Federal Affairs.

Interviewer – Could you give me a description of your title? What do you do exactly?

Mr. Cunningham – I am responsible for legislative and political activities of NRA at the Federal level, which includes the White House Administration and Congress.

Interviewer – Do you mean that you deal directly with the President and his staff when they have something in correlation with the NRA?

Mr. Cunningham - Members of Congress and members of the White House administration.

Interviewer – What interested you in working for the NRA?

Mr. Cunningham - Well, I am a gun owner, sportsman, and lover of freedom and I like to beat Liberals. I like to fight and beat them.

Interviewer – What purpose does the NRA serve, in your opinion?

Mr. Cunningham - Well, it is the protection of the Second Amendment and in some cases – due to passages of bad laws in the past, restoration.

Interviewer – What would you say the NRA's greatest strengths are currently?

Mr. Cunningham – Well, just not currently but all the time, the size and intensity of our membership. The political understanding and activism of our members is the key. That is primarily the strength of our organization.

Interviewer – Do you see any weaknesses in the organization?

Mr. Cunningham – Well there is always a weakness and we can always be better. We can always be bigger, stronger and better. A lot of that depends upon the political climate, fundraising and activism in our membership.

Interviewer – What is the greatest opportunities that you see within the organization at the time?

Mr. Cunningham – In what sense?

Interviewer – What are the opportunities that the NRA can seize on to today to make the organization better?

Mr. Cunningham – Well, I think in the current political climate we are doing the best we can. We do not have the same enthusiasm, motivation and intensity of our membership now than we did in 1999 and 2000. In addition, while it would be a horrible price to pay, a President Hillary Clinton could change that. Often in politics, good is bad, and bad is good and that is sort of the circumstance that we are facing today. Our members particularly at the nation level are satisfied and unconcerned about the threat to their Second Amendment rights since there is a Republican and friend in the White House and controlling the Senate and House.

*Below is an additional response to this question. It was received one after the interview.*

Mr. Cunningham – Often in politics, particularly as measured by fundraising and activism, good is bad and bad is good. Motivating people to contribute money and time to defeat something they oppose is much easier than exciting them to help enact public policy, which they support. Fear is a great motivator for many things and especially in the legislative and political process. During the 1980s, many conservative organizations disappeared or scaled back due to complacency by their membership and donors – or happiness with the Reagan administration and the direction of the country at that time. There was no "boogeyman" to excite their base of support. By contrast, in the 1990s, especially during his first two years in office, Clinton's policies and proposals – gays in the military, a record tax hike, national gun ban, and federal government control of health care – created a political atmosphere that helped conservative groups with tremendous levels of contributions and grassroots activism. This atmosphere, in a very large part, resulted in the 1994 midterm election results. Since the 2000 election, many of those conservative groups are again struggling because of the overall satisfaction of their constituency with those currently running the federal government. Fundraising and activism are very cyclical and closely related to the ability to have a "dragon to slay."

Interviewer – Yes Sir. I understand with what you are trying to get at. I was going to talk about that a little bit later in this interview.

Interviewer – What do you think the greatest threats to the organization are? I believe that you just outlined it by describing the differences of another political party. Is this your answer?

Mr. Cunningham – The NRA is not a partisan organization. Not all Republicans are pro-gun and not all Democrats are anti-gun.

Interviewer – How would you define what the greatest threat to the organization is? What are your biggest worries?

Mr. Cunningham – In the wake of a tragedy, dealing with firearms our biggest threats are ignorance and emotion. Many people jump to conclusions with very limited or even false information. That was the case in the wake of Columbine, which happened about six weeks after I came back to the NRA. I did not expect it to be a boring job, but I did not expect something of that magnitude to hit, or happen rather. There were twenty-one gun laws violated and I think eighteen federal and five state laws, just related to guns. That is excluding the murders and all of the other things. A twenty-second gun law would not have made any difference. When there was very little information about the tragedy in the intervening week or two, there was this constant pounding by the liberal media as well as liberals using the media to exploit the tragedy to promote gun control. It was a very difficult circumstance and Trent Lott, then Sen. Majority Leader, put the Juvenile Justice Bill on the Senate floor just three weeks after it. That created a very difficult position for us to be in. As it was, we still only lost by one vote. It was a tie vote that Al Gore broke against us. Which according to him was “the proudest vote he ever cast in the Senate” and it was very helpful in him being defeated for President in 2000. However, time had revealed the truth and allowed emotions to be healed and reason to prevail. The House then considered it in June a month or so after the Senate and they did



the right thing. They did not shut down gun shows, which Bill Clinton was trying to do. Others were trying to exploit the tragedy and promote their own anti-gun political agenda. Therefore, that is our biggest enemy in general is ignorance and emotion in the wake of a tragedy. If we can fight on the field of reason and fact, we win every time.

Interviewer – What makes the NRA different from other pro-gun and Second Amendment lobbies?

Mr. Cunningham – Well, I think we enjoy fighting and winning. Many other groups just enjoy fighting. I care about winning or even care more about being effective and credible. By contrast, that actually may end up helping us sometimes. Making the NRA seem more moderate and reasonable than the media and our adversaries would prefer.

I coined a phrase in dealing with what I call a “competitive group” back in my first tour of duty. Those that want all or nothing, get nothing. We all want to change the policies dramatically but often that cannot be done. To go from nothing to perfection all in one year, or in one bill, or in one session of Congress is very difficult. We have not lost these rights in one bill or one session of Congress or one state. Whether it was in 1968, with the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy or to other gun control measures that have passed in recent times, the misuse of certain guns is what the other side is waiting for. They want to pounce on some gun tragedy and exploit on peoples’ ignorance about guns and gun laws and their emotions.

Interviewer – Has the NRA’s strategy changed over time?

Mr. Cunningham – Although it is difficult, sometimes you cannot choose when you are on offense and you cannot choose when you are on defense. I think that during the five years when I was gone and it wasn’t because of me, but the person I left to avoid, she burnt a lot of bridges on Capital Hill and that did a great deal of harm to our reputation as a an organization. However, largely it has not changed – we are always striving to be more effective legislatively and politically and communicate our message in a very

responsible and rapid way to the right people who matter. We cannot and we do not possibly have the resources to change the opinion on the public quickly, because we do not have the same access as the national media does. Nevertheless, I think in promoting our agenda, for instance, reforming concealed carry laws at the state level. Every one of those states when they fought it said, “If this passes, there is going to be an OK Coral. Everyone will be shot in the streets, and violent crime is going to explode.” Well, in every case the opposite has actually taken place so, not to say that the media’s mind has been changed but the public mostly has been changed. In studies where it has been looked at intellectually, it has been proven that more guns do not result in more crimes. In fact, it results in less crime. When it comes to guns in the hands of law-abiding citizens, criminals do not apply for carrying permits and law abiding citizens that do get the permits, they do not commit the crimes. Therefore, there is no big deal here. We are just empowering people to be law-abiding citizens who choose to, protect themselves with a gun. Therefore, I think that has been helpful in the fact that it has disarmed our opponents by disproving their arguments. In addition, by being very politically active and successful I think that we have had a great deal of success in the elections and the great opportunity to be in the offense. You saw that in the ‘94 elections and you saw that in the 2000 elections. In 1994 more so in the state level, because we were still stuck with Bill Clinton on the Federal Level – so if you passed anything in Congress he was going to veto it. However that changed in 2000 when the Republicans controlled the Senate and House, but we had someone in the White House who would actually sign bills instead of vetoing them.

Interviewer – How influential is the NRA in American politics?

Mr. Cunningham – We are one of the more active Civil Right, slash, Conservative organizations in America, and that is why I enjoy working here. A couple of reasons I think that statement is true. One, we have a very active membership that is united on this issue rather than on a generic civil rights or conservative group that has a broader agenda. We have a very narrow agenda. We may differ on many other issues. However, this is

one where we I think we are united and I think that another part of that is member intensity. I will sort of lay this out for you as far as political dynamics. A lot of times as far as the past, not in recent times – certainly Gephardt and the 2000 election and Gore and Clinton made the miscalculation in '94. They looked at polling data, which in virtually every part of the country if you ask them “Do you support gun control?” The overwhelming response will be for gun control. It does not matter where it is, because you are asking almost a nonsensical question. You are asking a question that is not very persistent. Because, to our side of the issue gun control is being able to “hit” your target, you are asking it in a vacuum as if there is nothing else that can be a choice. You are not asking how strongly people feel about it, so if they are ambivalent towards it, but it sounds good because it does not affect them, sure I will support it. Therefore, based only the question in polling many political candidates and consultants have come up on the losing side. Surprisingly from their point of view because they have not asked the more important questions based exclusively on this issue who are you more or less likely to vote for a candidate because that tests intensity. What you will find is virtually in every district in the country, the intensity on this issue is on our side. Moreover, the reason for that is to proponents of gun control, this is a philosophical issue. They have no stake. It is just a political debate. There are generally liberal Democrats, who vote for liberal Democrats for a variety of reasons, including their support for gun control. On our side of the issue, you physically have people who have something to lose. That is, something that they have bought or inherited or was given to them, that they use for hunting every year, they use for target shooting, for self defense everyday, collecting. These are the people who have so much more to lose and with that. They have more passion, incentive, and motivation to defend their right to keep what they have rather than lose it. Therefore, the intensity is something that the other side has always miscalculated and the way that they have done that is through the wake of a tragedy they get the national media to whip up the country into frenzy, but it never lasts. Reason and facts start to come back, memories start to fade and they realize that “low and behold this doesn't make sense anymore.” The other question is, “Do you think gun control is effective in reducing crimes or criminal access to guns?” Overwhelmingly, proponents of gun control do not

think that gun control is crime control. Therefore, if you provide them with an alternative in a political climate, like when there was George Allen for Governor in '93 for Virginia. Where the lines were drawn and his opponent, who was a state wide official who was calling for a state wide waiting period and he was calling for abolition of parole for state wide criminals. Mr. Allen held his entire base on the Second Amendment and cut into half of her support. Her people did not, while they supported gun control, did not feel strongly about it and did not think it was as effective. When presented with an alternative that George Allen called "the abolishing of the liberal parole system for violent criminals" that was far more attractive and their common sense overrode their emotion and ambivalence of gun control. Therefore, George Allen won – HUGE!

If we do our job in identifying, registering and turning out to vote these people, after endorsing for a candidate who clearly is better than their constituent, than we make a big difference in close races. In addition, a big part of our political strategy is not to spread our resources thin by contributing to members of Congress or legislators who are running for re-election where there is a clearly defined victory. We concentrate our overwhelming political resources, the NRA Political Victory Fund money, on races where we can make the most difference.

Interviewer – In talking about political parties, one of my questions was does the NRA favor one political party to the other, and you stated they do not. However, there was . . .  
(Stopped by Mr. Cunningham)

Mr. Cunningham – It works to our advantage when the Republicans are in control of the White House and Congress more than Democrats are, generally. But then again not all Republicans are pro-gun, like my Congressman Tom Davis and not all Democrats are anti-gun.

Interviewer – Mr. Chris Cox said that he was going to “expose Democrats who act as though they are pro-gun, but in the view of the NRA where not” for example the John Kerry’s ad, “*That Dog Don’t Hunt.*” How effective do you think those campaign ads had in the 2004 elections outcome?

Mr. Cunningham – Exposing John Kerry’s hypocrisy and inconsistency?

Interviewer – Yes Sir, in particularly the key battle ground states. How much do you think the NRA influenced the outcome in that election?

Mr. Cunningham – Well, I think that we did a good job of it and I think the shamelessness of John Kerry hurt himself in the end. He had that pheasant hunt photo-op in Iowa for the Primary and he had another one in the spring, but the goose hunting thing sort of came across as “pandering” and I think the media saw that and portrayed it thus. He even made buying hunting license three or four days prior a photo-op. Then on that, he had a two-decade long record of voting against the Second Amendment at every opportunity. I mean, the first votes that he cast in 2004 that year, were on our bill. He voted to ban guns, gun shows, and hunting ammunition. He cast those first three votes in the 2004 session. He came off the campaign trail to vote on the Feinstein Amendment the McCain Amendment and the Kennedy Amendment. He then walked off the floor, joyously with other anti-Second Amendment allies like Diane Feinstein, Ted Kennedy and Chuck Schumer. Therefore, we put that on the cover of our magazine. I think he helped himself in exposing himself for what and who he is.

Interviewer – With a Republican in the White House and holding the majority in Congress, is the NRA just as effective?

Mr. Cunningham – The short answer is yes. You pick up what votes and offices when you can, whenever you can, wherever you can. Because times will not always be good and forgiving and you will need that margin for when circumstances will change and on

this issue as was proven in 1999. Everything was good in March when I came back. We were introducing our Lawsuit Bill and six weeks later we are bailing water in a boat that is about to sink and now we are back on top again. You want to take advantages of your opportunities every chance you get. That is why we do not spread our resources thin and we focus putting our political resources where they will make the most difference.

Interviewer – With a Republican majority in the government, how satisfied are you with passing or not passing of laws that pertain to the Second Amendment?

Mr. Cunningham – Well, I guess I am never satisfied. I am a very impatient person, ironically Wayne (NRA's Executive Vice President) and I talked about this leaving the signing ceremony after the President signed the Protection of Lawful Commerce and Arms Act. I said "Do you remember what I said back in 86' when the McClure-Volkner Act passed?" He said, "As a matter of fact I do." I said, "It took you seven years to pass this bill, I don't have the patience and time to ever work in Federal Affairs." Of course, I left the NRA and came back and now run the Federal Affairs and it took us six years to pass the Craig-Stearns Bill.

Interviewer – With that being said, since 2000 and Republicans being in control would you still say that you are not . . . . (Stopped by Mr. Cunningham)

Mr. Cunningham – I am saying that we had a great year last year. Still my standard is impossible to meet and it is never enough. I am always looking for opportunities to improve, no matter how successful we have been.

Interviewer – Who are the NRA's strongest supporters currently in Congress?

Mr. Cunningham – Larry Craig no doubt in the Senate and we have a lot of support in the House. Many people are strong with our issues. However, Larry Craig stands above heads and shoulders in the Senate. In the House, it is more difficult to judge because there are so many.

Interviewer – If there needs to be a change in the way, the NRA does its business, who recommends changes?

Mr. Cunningham – If it deals with Federal and Legislative affairs, yes that would be me.

Interviewer – All right Sir. I believe this ends the organizational and political section of this interview.

### **III. MEDIA RELATIONS**

Past studies have overwhelmingly proven that the NRA has had far more negative press coverage than any other comparable social organization of its size. Because the NRA is so well organized, with millions of members one would feel that it would receive vast amounts of positive media reports. According to many past and present senior NRA officials as well as organizations that study the media, this is not the case. Negative media plays a very important role in how the NRA creates its communicative strategy with its members and the public. In a way of explaining strategy of conflict, this chapter will explain how the NRA actually benefits substantially from negative press coverage (Patrick, 7). Negative coverage allows the NRA to accuse what they call “the out of touch biased elite media” with undermining the Second Amendment rights of the American public.

Today, most Americans base their opinions from mainstream media sources (Patrick, 48). The question then arises on how the NRA uses this generally negative coverage to incorporate a strategy of turning this quandary into positive energy. This can reveal how the NRA uses communication with its members and potential members separately from how it communicates with the public. Studies have overwhelmingly shown the more negative press coverage the NRA receives, the greater its membership has grown (Patrick, 9).

#### **A. ELITE NEWSPAPERS**

Elite media sources are those that are the most influential in print media. Examples of such elite media sources are the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *The Christian Science Monitor* and *Los Angeles Times*. All of these papers are widely recognized as having the highest levels of influence and access within the areas of politics, business and government. Furthermore, the articles found in these newspapers are highly referenced to by other types of media sources such as television and radio.



To define negative coverage in newspapers, the NRA was compared to other large organizations that also had vast memberships, political activism and well circulated publications. The organizations that were used for a comparison statistical model were The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), The American Association for Retired Persons (AARP), The National Association for the Advancement of Colored Persons (NAACP) and Handgun Control, Inc (HCI). A large data collection of articles from elite media sources were collected and analyzed for content on each of these organizations. Much of the results were statically significant at the 99% level (Patrick, 51). Below is a quote from Mr. Brian Patrick on the results of the study.

Compared to the coverage of AARP, ACLU, NAACP and HCI, those articles discussing the NRA tend to have fewer paragraphs with direct quotations or attributed viewpoints, less utilization of pseudo-events, less favorable use of personalization techniques and more use of joking or punning headlines. They also have higher levels of satire or mockery directed at the NRA, more negative use of verbs of attribution, less use of appropriate titles of organizational NRA spokespersons or actors, and lower mean scores for measures of pro- or anti-democracy themes, extremism themes and science-progress themes....Tone and semantics also tend to be more negative for the NRA in editorial and op-ed coverage than for other groups....Non-NRA groups generally do not differ statistically from each other, just the NRA. For the most part, the non-NRA groups fare much alike over the long term, while the NRA fares badly. These differences are neither subtle nor ambiguous (Patrick, 52).

## **B. TELEVISION**

In May 2000, *The Media Research Center* released a two-year study on television reporting on gun control. The stories were categorized based on the main theme of the report through recommendations or sound bites. Those reports that centered on the main theme of *violent crimes occur because of guns and not criminals or more gun control leads to less crime* had a label of favoring more gun control. Those stories with themes that stated *gun control would not reduce crime or criminals and not guns were the main source of violent crime* had a label of opposing more gun control. If no distinguishable theme was present, then the report was considered neutral. In 653 reports analyzed, those stories advocating gun control outnumbered stories opposing gun control 357 to 36, or a

ratio of nearly 10 to 1 and 260 reports were categorized as neutral. Anti-gun sound bites occurred 412 times compared to 209 pro-gun sound bites.

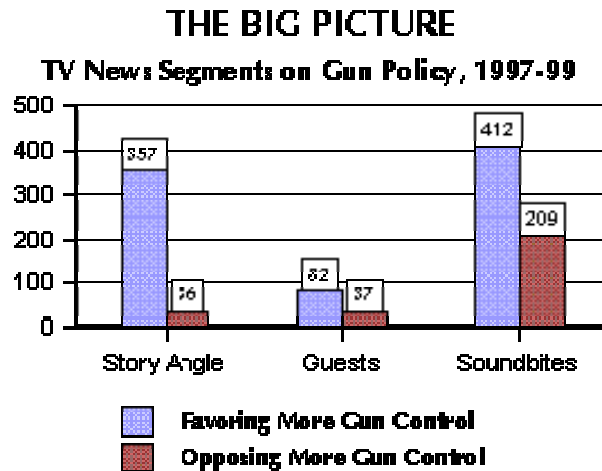


Figure 4. Displays television news coverage from 1997-1999 (Dickens, 1)

### C. COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The more negative media coverage the NRA receives, the larger its membership base grows (Patrick, 135). Figure 5 is an illustration of documented negative media coverage. The negative coverage is proven statistically significant at the .05 level when in correlation to membership.

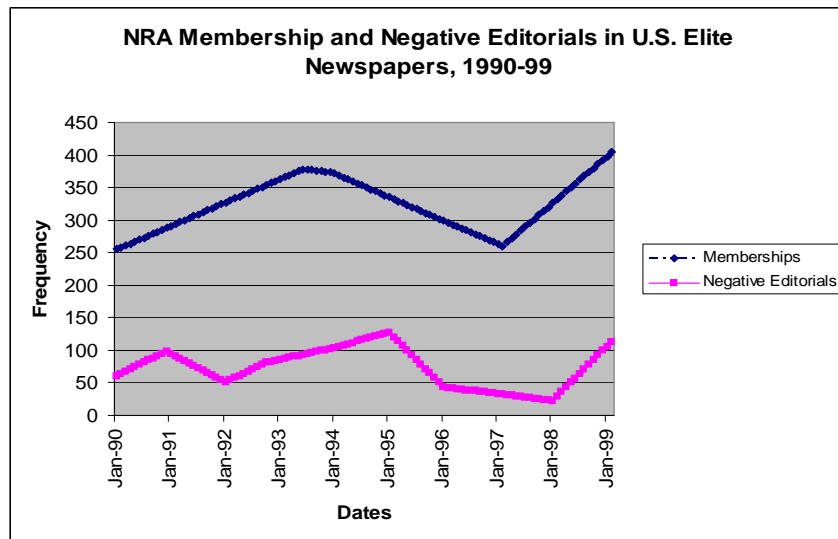


Figure 5. The correlation between NRA membership and negative coverage = .654. The relationship test for significance,  $F(1, 9) = 5.97$  at the  $p = .04$  level,  $R\text{-squared} = .427$ , adjusted  $R\text{-squared} = .356$  (Patrick, 135).

The reason for this statistical correlation is the NRA's ability to confront this negative news coverage with a successful communications strategy. The NRA confronts this perceived threat by labeling these elite media sources as strictly biased and focused towards an anti-gun platform. The NRA creates its own media campaign that distributes millions of pieces of literature that points out the clear disparities in the media. The NRA also directly relates the negative media coverage to a threat on the Second Amendment. This threat mobilizes more members to join or have sympathetic supporters act on their behalf. A good example would be the Columbine school shootings in Colorado. Even when the NRA was receiving the harshest negative press than at any other time in the 1990s, memberships went up substantially (Patrick 135-144). Mr. Patrick outlines the NRA strategy on the media.

The major lesson here is that the NRA has institutionalized around negative media coverage, re-interpreting and redirecting it for its own ends. This anti-media theory functions a unifying epistemic foundation to the NRA world. By pointing out and sensitizing members (and potential members) to negative coverage as evidence of class-cultural conflict, the NRA is able to more effectively promote an aggrieved sense of identity that in turn sustains the action—in solidarity to social movement mobilization (Patrick, 106).

#### **D. CURRENT STRATEGY OF THE NRA WITHIN THE MEDIA**

In order to gain the most current insight on media relations within the NRA, interview questions concerning the media were given to both Mr. Caroline and Mr. Cunningham.

##### **1. Interview with Mr. Caroline on the Media**

Interviewer – When the average American hears about the NRA, what does he or she think?

Mr. Caroline – I think that it depends on the average American. I think that they think about safety, responsibility and freedom. Or they think about the image the media would like to portray on the NRA, keeping guns legal for criminals. It boils down to who is the messenger. I don't think there is an average American viewpoint. I think that when Americans think about the NRA they think of patriotism, safety, responsibility and freedom. And then there are other people who, when they hear "NRA," because they are ignorant of the NRA and what we actually stand for, think about wanting to keep guns legal for criminal access, which couldn't be further from the truth.

Interviewer – Do you think that the NRA gets fair and balanced coverage in the main stream press?

Mr. Caroline – Unequivocally no! In addition, I will provide you with some academic studies analyzing news reports on gun issues, which will show you how out of balanced it is. This is not a question of do you believe, or your opinion – this is just look for yourself.

Interviewer – Based on the negative press over the last ten years, do you think media coverage has improved, stayed the same or gotten worse?

Mr. Caroline – I think I will answer that by saying the NRA has done a better job or worked even more diligently in trying to change that. Whether it is through public speaking or editorials written by NRA Members, there has been an improvement. Charlton Heston, as our President, has opened a lot of doors for media outlets. Had he not been a celebrity, those doors would not have been opened. Because of his star power, the NRA was allowed a lot more opportunities than some other average Joe the NRA staff member would have had. That helped us get our message out even though, no fault of the NRA, we still have along way to go. The national media are not getting it done and are not being fair and balanced. Obviously there are some places that the NRA does very well in. Talk radio, radio in general, provides an open forum we do very well in. But when you talk about what most Americans would consider the national Media; ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Washington Times, LA Times and New York Times there is still an innate built-in bias where they try to use those forums to advance an anti-gun agenda to the detriment of the NRA and the detriment of law abiding gun owners.

Interviewer – To go further on that subject, in the last ten years, there are more avenues of media . . . (stopped by Mr. Caroline)

Mr. Caroline – We have our own on-line daily news show called, “NRAnews.com” that was put in place specifically for this reason. To get around the filter of the national news media and speak directly to those people that log on and watch that news program each day. So yes, there are new avenues that have made it a little bit better – but I still think that when you look at the power and control that the big papers and networks have, they have a responsibility to do a much better job than they have done in the past years.

Interviewer – Do you think that the negative coverage sometimes works in favor of the NRA?

Mr. Caroline – I need to break that down into two parts. First of all I don’t think that the news media portray the NRA as the underdog. I mean, if you look at the adjectives used

to describe us it is, “The Powerful Gun Lobby”, or “Awash in Money,” so they make us out to be bigger than we are.

Interviewer – What about the public’s point of view?

Mr. Caroline – What I was going to say is that there is an affect that all of the negative coverage has. This is somewhat of a benefit to us in the sense that the committed, already on board NRA member gets very mad at the lies, the half truths and falsehoods and this inspires them to speak up and speak out and speak up to say “That’s not true!” or “Hey, I need to do more!”. So, in essence, the negative coverage that the national media present, inspires our members to speak out. Then again, there are those that only hear what the media say, so that presents the NRA with an uphill battle.

Interviewer – How do those that do not access your website see that there is another point of view, other than what the mainstream media portray?

Mr. Caroline – It is us taking the issue at hand and educating the “average American.” We accomplish this through workshops, and the NRA publications that we send out, through e-mails and speaking out on public forums to try and educate our members and those that have not heard or have seen the NRA publications. We try to be proactive, and not wait for people to come to us but for us to go to them and drive the issue out. A lot of our support comes from word of mouth, from one member educating another or e-mails that we send out and the member then forwards the e-mail out to others. Amplifying our message to others that are not currently on our list is a strategy.

Interviewer – When you say the “Other Side,” what organization would say is the opposite of the NRA?

Mr. Caroline – Well, probably the best known anti-gun organization would be the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence. They used to go by Hand Gun Control Inc. ran by

President Reagan's old press secretary. Although well known, they are much smaller than the NRA and not as effective as the NRA. I believe they are aided and headed very much by the media who tend to publicize their positions every chance they get.

Interviewer – As far as speaking on negative press coverage, is there one station or news media group above others that tends to amplify negative coverage?

Mr. Caroline – The New York Times is terrible, CBS news is terrible, but in some of this information I will give you, it shows the more egregious offenders more often than not. But it's not like, the New York Times is good and the Chicago Tribune is good – it's just the degree of how biased they are. The Washington Post is terrible, the LA Times, The Wall Street editorials board in general can be a little bit more sympathetic or a little bit more objective. Fox News is probably more objective than CNN but by and large the papers that I have rattled off the news networks, are all fairly biased.

## **2. Interview with Mr. Cunningham on the Media**

Interviewer – When the average American hears about the NRA what does he or she think about in your opinion?

Mr. Cunningham – I guess it depends on the people. Different people will interpret different things. For some it is an organization that sponsors the shooting events. It is a personal question that I am not sure there is really a uniform answer to. Some see the NRA as a connection to gun violence. I don't feel that the average American does or the majority of Americans do, but some do and certainly the liberals in the media do.

Interviewer – Yes sir that is what I was trying to direct the questions to. I read a book, The NRA and the Media, where it outlines the disparity of fair or positive press coverage from the NRA compared to other organizations. My question is this, does the NRA get fair press coverage?

Mr. Cunningham – No way! I still don't think that is connected to what the majority of Americans think about the NRA. I think the first thing they think is; protector of the Second Amendment and then others would think of competitive shooting, hunting and gun safety educating. I think we are known for our politics, even though that was not the original intent of our founding. Our founding was in 1871 by Yankee Officers who discovered that between the war with the states their side could not shoot very well and needed a civilian marksmanship program. That is actually the founding of the NRA. It only evolved into a political organization after the Gun Control Act of '68 and when Congress, along with some states, started passing restrictive laws. Before then it was a national shooting club.

Interviewer – Now sir, in terms of the press and my previous question of whether or not the NRA gets fair and balanced coverage in the press and you said that it doesn't . . . .  
(Stopped Mr. Cunningham)

Mr. Cunningham – I don't even think that is an opinion. I think that is a fact. I would point you to the Media Research Center and some other independent resources to verify that.

Interviewer – However, do you believe that it has improved, stayed the same or gotten worse over the last five to ten years?

Mr. Cunningham – Well that '99–2000 period wasn't too good. Gun control seemed to be the solution to every problem in the wake of Columbine. Since the 2000 election, if you just look at the last five years, it has improved only in the sense that they might not like us, but begrudgingly might respect us and I think accordingly haven't praised us. They have just shut-up about us. Sort of, if you can't say something nasty don't say anything at all. Opposite of what my parents told me, but I think it almost plays into the complacency of our membership. We are not on the front line of politics anymore. The other side has given credit but they don't really want to talk about gun control anymore



and I think that reason is that their “heads” tell them that gun control is not a political winner. So the other side has figured out that the more they stir up our constituents the more ground they seem to loose.

Interviewer – Do you think that this overwhelming negative coverage by the media helps the NRA?

Mr. Cunningham – Sure, it did in 1999 and 2000. It aroused a sleeping constituency. Those that said, “I let my membership lapse, but I can’t believe what Rosie O’Donnell said at the Thousand Mile March” or “I can’t believe what Gore and Bradley were debating about.”

Interviewer – Now, Sir, does the NRA need to have a villain to . . . . (Stopped Mr. Cunningham)

Mr. Cunningham – No, but it makes us much more effective to have one, let’s put it that way. In fact, I will send you a book on special interest groups by Clyde Wilcox, a Georgetown Prof. Again, often in politics “good is bad and bad is good.” Right now we are fighting complacency within our ranks, but when the tides turn we will get busy here with membership and fundraising and then again we will make a difference.

## IV. DETERMINING NRA STRATEGY

The purpose of the NRA, as described by their by-laws is to protect, uphold and preserve the Second Amendment Rights of the American citizen. In order to determine what makes the NRA so successful there needs to be a detailed look at its current organizational strategy. In order to gauge how this is done, this paper has attempted a qualitative investigation of the cognitive relationships the NRA has with its subsequent stakeholders. Primary references will be the NRA members, media sources and politicians. It is the author's hypothesis that these stakeholders and their relationship to each other hold the key to how the NRA operates so successfully. This chapter originates and then investigates this hypothesis with the information gathered from the various published reference materials used in this paper as well as the use of the information gathered from personal interviews with senior NRA personnel.

The NRA has enjoyed a number of tremendous successes. The application of the NRA-ILA over the past 30 years has made the organization a formidable force that has defeated numerous pieces of proposed gun control legislation. The NRA has influenced the outcomes of elections at every level within government. The most notable victory was in 1994 with the historic change of power within the US Congress. President Clinton attributed the 2000 Presidential election of electing George Bush on the NRA. Al Gore had embarrassingly lost in his home state of Tennessee largely through the efforts of the NRA.

The NRA has won many victories in fighting lawsuits against gun owners and the gun industry. President Bush recently signed into law the *Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act*. The passage of this law was a very large milestone for the NRA. The law passed easily in both houses on Congress before having it signed by President Bush. The Senate voted 65–31 and the US House voted 283–144 (en.wikipedia.org). Both votes won by substantial margins. The purpose of this new law is to prevent firearm manufacturers and dealers from being legally liable for crimes committed with the use of their products.

According to *Fortune* magazine, the NRA is the most influential lobbying group in the US. Periodically the magazine investigates and ranks various large lobbying organizations and creates a list the magazine calls “*The Washington Power 25.*”. For many years, the AARP had taken the top spot. In 2001, the NRA for the first time received the top position. This was quite a feat for the NRA with its four million members for in comparison the AARP has over 35 million members.

#### **A. GOAL**

The overriding goal of the NRA has been clear since the *Revolt in Cincinnati* in 1977. The protection of the Second Amendment is paramount over all other goals. All other programs within the organization are a footstep to reaching and maintaining that one paramount goal. NRA senior personnel are by design constrained in the actions they take. This is due to members serving as the oversight body to the organization. Since 1977, members choose senior board members at predetermined annual meetings. Since NRA leadership is constrained to only their members, they quickly learn that having increased power and influence outside of the organization is essential in order to appease membership and get the results they consistently demand.

#### **B. SOURCES**

By increasing influential power outside of the organization, the NRA is in a superior position to protect the paramount goal of protecting the Second Amendment. However, it is only when the membership base has felt threatened has the NRA been able to achieve its greatest victories and gain the most memberships. Therefore, the NRA frames multiple threats to the Second Amendment on its members. Without a perceived threat on the Second Amendment, the NRA loses position in energizing its members to act on its behalf. These strategies presumably help increase or maintain an active membership. The past 30 years have seen the largest political efforts to restrict the use

and possession of firearms. This then explains for the rapid expansion of membership from 1977 until today. Therefore, the NRA needs to have a large base of active members in order to be effective.

### **C. TACTICS**

For the NRA to remain vibrant and effective there needs to be active participation among its members. Therefore, the NRA has taken steps to adjust its strategy into constantly reaching members that are more non-traditional. Aside from the traditional programs, there are various other programs offered by the NRA that give many non-traditional members many opportunities to participate. This is an effective way to exploit the NRA's resources by expanding its membership base to different areas of American society. These programs also combat negative stereotypes that the NRA is an all white male organization.

The political victories since 1977 have made the NRA a tremendous asset or foe to many politicians. The creation of the NRA-ILA is paramount in understanding how the NRA went from a shooting organization to the one of the most powerful lobbying groups. Soon after Mr. Carter took over for the NRA-ILA, he realized that government intervention was the real true threat to the Second Amendment. Therefore, the only way to defeat such a threat was to increase the NRA's source of power and influence within US politics. By doing so through the NRA-ILA, it expanded the NRA's ability to shape the political landscape on all Second Amendment issues. This was evident with the many victories that the NRA had accomplished under Mr. Carter. It was also true years later during the 1994 US National Elections with the historic change of power within the US Congress.

The strategy on how the NRA-ILA organizes politically is very central to understanding membership activism in politics. The ability to contact members and to have them act politically on behalf of the NRA is paramount. The NRA-ILA takes very proactive measures to ensure that members understand their local politician's position on Second Amendment Issues. One of the more effective ways is through NRA political

scorecards. These scorecards give a candidate running for office a grade of A through F based on their position on Second Amendment issues. This system provides a simple and effective means for members to understand their local candidate's position on Second Amendment issues.

#### **D. IDENTITY**

Organizational identity is important for both the organization and the members who belong to it. Individual members in a social organization commonly feel that belonging to an active social organization enhances their personal self-esteem and sense of identity. Hence, the greater level of satisfaction in a social organization results in greater levels of membership, long-term commitment and superior levels of participation. The NRA has used this concept as a base to build one of the most elaborate and diverse forms of membership services of any social organization within the United States. The concept behind the NRA's strategy in relationship to NRA members, aside from being a pro-Second Amendment organization, is to offer many forms of publications, programs and incentives. For an annual cost of \$35 a member receives:

- an annual subscription to any one of four NRA magazines, which includes a magazine designed specifically for women,
- a \$10,000 insurance policy for any accidental death or dismemberment that results from any NRA event or any accidents that occur during the use of firearms or hunting equipment. This coverage increases to \$25,000 for law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty,
- a \$1,000 of property insurance coverage. This plan covers firearms, air guns, bows and arrows against theft, loss and damage,
- legislative updates and voting information on candidates for public office,
- a NRA shooting cap,
- a personalized identification card, a window decal and

- discounts from national corporations for car rentals, hotels, and airline tickets.

It is difficult to concede that these benefits alone would create one of the most influential organizations within the US. The base of support of the NRA comes from more than any financial incentive or publication offered through membership. It comes from an identity that is created by members acting on behalf of the organization, versus just belonging. With every political victory the NRA receives, comes a more strengthened identity for the members as well as the organization. Because of this strategy, the NRA has rightfully gained an identity that does not allow separating the members from NRA Headquarters in Fairfax, Virginia.

The NRA has been able to create an enormous outreach program in order to attract non-traditional members and diversify its membership. Through this diversification effort, the NRA is able to promote its agenda across more segments of society, allowing the NRA to have more influence than its total number of members would suggest. Furthermore, the NRA is able to grow out of the negative misconception that they are an organization designed only to attract male members.

### **1. Women of the NRA**

Currently the NRA has over four million total members and is continually exploring ways to expand the face of its membership. Traditionally, white adult males have made up the vast majority of officials and members and therefore been criticized by many in the elite media for being a “good old boys” club. The NRA has attempted to counter this claim with some key strategic decisions not through words, but through actions. The NRA’s current President is Susan Froman. Ms. Froman is the second woman and first Jewish NRA President.



Figure 6. NRA President Sandra Froman addresses the crowd at the 134<sup>th</sup> NRA Annual Meeting in Houston.

The NRA has also made women's programs an important priority within the organization. *Women on Target* is a program designed for women in order to allow them more hunting and shooting opportunities. According to the NRA, there are about two million women who hunt and an additional four million who enjoy target shooting. Past research by the NRA shows that these numbers of women participating in these sports are steadily increasing. This program aids women with lessons in shooting and hunting skills in a women-only environment. *Refuse to be a Victim* is another program that teaches women about the dangers of crime and proactive safety measures that can help prevent it. The program does not require NRA membership ([www.nrahq.org](http://www.nrahq.org)).



Figure 7. A student with an instructor at a NRA sponsored shooting matches for women.

## 2. Youth Programs

The NRA has often been the center of criticism for when young children die due to an accidental shooting in the home. This was a large cultural topic in Michael Moore's award winning documentary movie, *Bowling for Columbine*. The movie brought vast public awareness to the problem and indirectly blamed the NRA as one of the reasons for it. The NRA reacted to such negativity by pointing out the many programs in firearm education for youths and young children. One of the more popular programs is the *Eddie Eagle* program. This program teaches children in pre-K through third grade important lessons in encountering a firearm. The NRA offers instructional videos and study aids to schools at little or no cost. None of the *Eddie Eagle* program materials ever shows a firearm. The purpose of the program is to stop the number of accidental shootings involving young children. To date, the program has reached 18 million children ([www.nrahq.org](http://www.nrahq.org)).





Figure 8. Eddie Eagle pictured with law enforcement official teaching young children what to do if they encounter a firearm.

The NRA has also put a large amount of resources particularly behind young adult programs. These programs offer shooting matches, essay contests and hunter education courses that are specifically for young adults. *InSights* magazine is a monthly publication specifically for NRA youth members. This magazine gives up to date information on shooting matches and other special events that junior NRA members can participate. The NRA also affiliates with many other youth organizations to include the Boy Scouts, 4-H clubs and many commercial summer camps ([www.nrahq.org](http://www.nrahq.org)).

### 3. Law Enforcement

The NRA has had an official relationship with US law enforcement agencies since the 1960's. The relationship usually consists of the NRA offering various firearm-training courses to law enforcement agencies for little or no cost. Annually, the NRA hosts a *National Police Shooting Championship*, which attracts law enforcement agencies from around the world to compete. The NRA also gives many awards to officers, which is to include the highly distinguished *Officer of the Year* award. This close relationship gives the NRA an added tool to use in promoting the safe use of firearms. The NRA has often been the center of controversy concerning firearms and violent criminals. This

relationship with law enforcement has had a positive impact for the NRA when the organization needed law enforcement spokespeople to speak on their behalf ([www.nrahq.org](http://www.nrahq.org)).

#### **4. Election Volunteer Coordinators**

The continued training of the Election Volunteer Coordinators' (EVC) gives the NRA a diverse source of influence by coordinating local election meetings throughout most of the Congressional districts in the US. This method also allows ECVs' to create and organize a platform for other NRA members to participate on behalf of the organization. This tactic allows the NRA to have a human face outside of NRA Headquarters in Fairfax, Virginia. Furthermore, it gives the NRA the ability to handle almost every issue with state and local level constituents. According to Mr. Caroline, this is the most important element that makes the NRA vastly different from all the other organizations of its size: one on one communication ([www.nraila.org](http://www.nraila.org)).

#### **5. Hunter Programs**

The NRA sees hunting programs as a way to expand its influence outside of normal gun owners. This tactic allows the NRA to gain greater influence with the 17 million hunters currently in the US. As a result, this allows the NRA greater opportunities for new memberships and the ability to expand its base of support. The NRA also provides information for hunter education courses. As outlined in the interview with Mr. Caroline:

Interviewer – Does the NRA address other issues that may be related but are outside the scope of the Second Amendment? You brought up public access for hunting earlier.

Mr. Caroline – Absolutely, that specific issue is a huge component of what we in the Institute for Legislative Action do. Whether it is making sure that public lands are accessible and open or reducing red tape or what we are calling “No net loss land”. Where for every acre that the government shuts down to no hunting they have to open up

another acre of hunting land so there is no “net loss” of hunting land and access. We have specific staff and departments where all they do is monitor those types of threats to hunters and hunting. To ensure that hunters have access to public lands and that hunting regulations are not so restrictive as to discriminate against hunters that want to go into the field. We have a Hunters Services Division, Conservation and Wildlife Division and a Legislative Hunting Division. We also provide a magazine just for hunters, safety courses as well as a NRA hunt club program. Protecting hunters’ rights and access is a major day-to-day component of what we try to accomplish here.

## **6. Successful Diversification**

Because of these programs, the NRA has been able to expand, not only the number of its members, but also its diversity. This may partly explain why the NRA has had unparalleled success in the last ten years. Not only do these programs give the NRA a better public relation image, but it also helps silence their most staunch critics who echo that they are an all male organization. The NRA does not seem to be slowing down in creating new initiatives for all members of society to participate in. This continued trend will surely only add more influence to the organization.

## **E. RESULTS**

The NRA also has the ability to change its strategy according to its threats and opportunities. Since gun friendly politicians now control all the federal branches of government, the NRA has used the opportunity to lobby for laws favorable to their position. This explains the long waited but successful passage of the *Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act* in 2005. However, in 1992 it was just the opposite political landscape for the NRA. During that time, anti-gun politicians controlled all federal branches. The NRA had to use all its resources to educate its membership on that perceived threat. The strategies of implementing through media, membership and political resources allowed the NRA to mobilize its constituency, which in turn ended up historically changing the US Congress.



Figure 9. President Bush signing the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act in 2005

The NRA uses all of its strategies to implement change favorable to their position. These of strategies all labor to achieve the paramount goal of protecting the Second Amendment through member activism. However, each strategy has its own procedural template to bring about this goal. The political strategy encompasses educating a member to vote, write to a politician, or some other form of political activism. The media strategy allows members to receive information on current issues concerning the NRA as well to confront the negative press received from the elite media. The membership strategy creates many diverse programs for the member to participate in. These programs also allow members the opportunity to get to know other members and bond. Together, all of these strategies work towards one paramount goal and have created one of the most powerful social organizations in the history of the US.

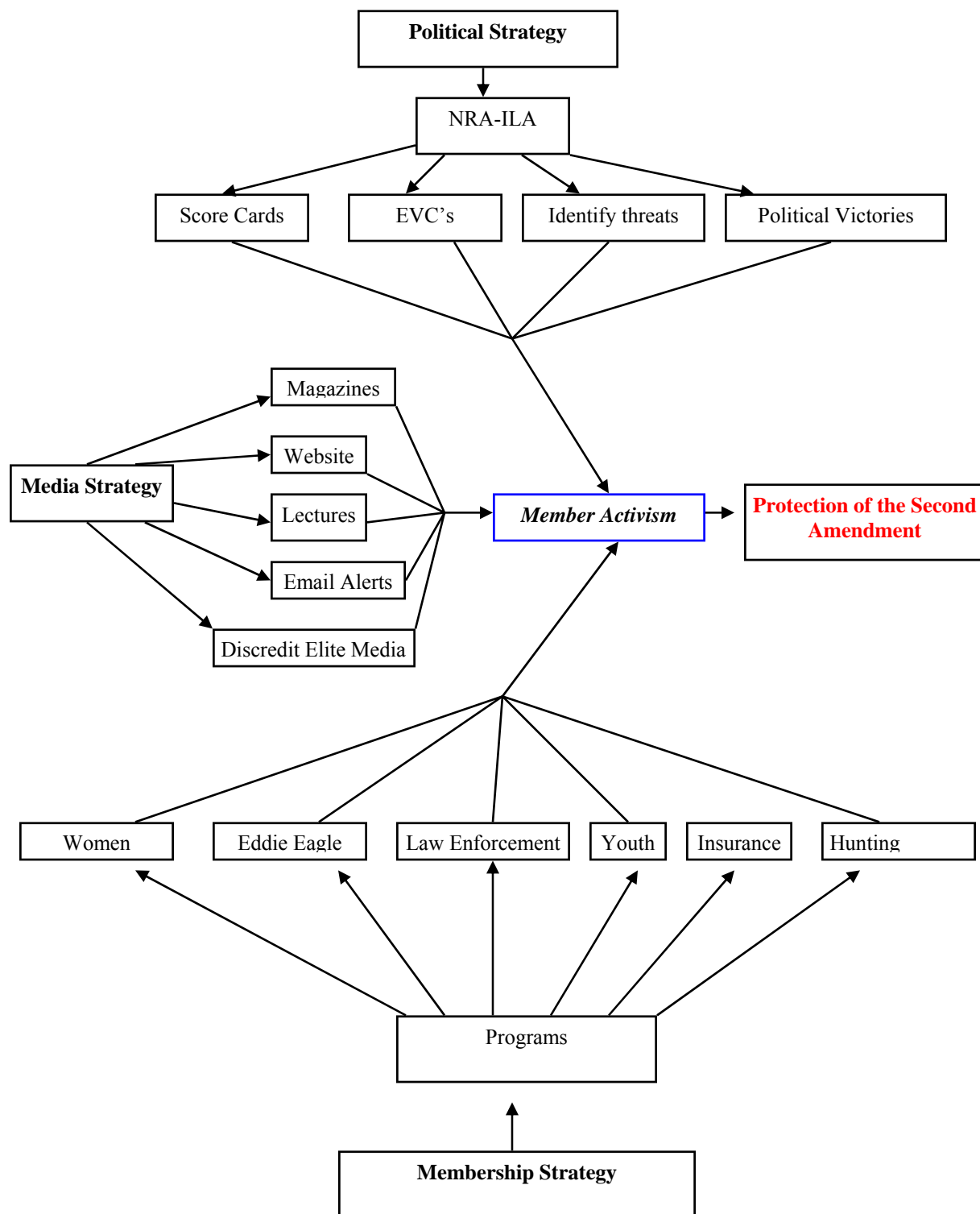


Figure 10. Flowchart of NRA Strategy

Rank 2001	Organization
1	NRA
2	AARP
3	National Federation of independent Business
4	American Israel Public Affairs Committee
5	Association of Trial Lawyers
6	AFL-CIO
7	Chamber of Commerce
8	National Beer Wholesalers Association
9	National Association of Realtors
10	National Association of Manufacturers
11	National Association of Home Builders
12	American Medical Association
13	American Hospital Association
14	National Education Association
15	American Farm Bureau Federation
16	Motion Picture Association of America
17	National Association of Broadcasters
18	National Right to Life Committee
19	Health Insurance Association
20	National Restaurant Association
21	National Governors Association
22	Recording Industry Association
23	American Bankers Association
24	Pharmaceutical Research & Manufacturers
25	International Brotherhood of Teamsters

Table 1. Fortune Magazine's 2001 "The Washington Power 25"

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## V. CASE STUDY

### A. ISSUE

The District of Columbia has banned handguns and semi-automatic firearms since 1976. In 2004, under intense lobbying the NRA, lawmakers in Congress proposed the bill HR 3193 or commonly known as the *District of Columbia Personal Protection Act*. The purpose of this bill was to repeal many of the gun restrictions imposed in 1976. On September 29, 2004 the bill passed the US House of Representatives by a margin of 250-171. The vote included the support of the vast majority of Republicans but also included 51 Democrats. However, since the bill passed the House, there has been more vibrant and decisive debate in the Senate. As a result, the bill has been a dividing line on gun control.

The National Rifle Association (NRA) views the passage of the *District of Columbia Personal Protection Act* as a major step into reversing an anti-gun trend that has occurred in Washington D.C. since the early 1970's. Since the recent passage and signing into law by President Bush of the *Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act*, the NRA sees HR 3193 as their biggest issue for gun owners. Below are remarks from an interview with Mr. Glen Caroline, Director of the NRA's Grassroots Division in December 2005:

Right now, a lot of our top legislation in the US Congress is to appeal the 1976 Washington DC handgun ban. The District of Columbia has had a ban on handguns for the better part of 30 years. I do not think it is a secret that it has been an abysmal failure. Washington D.C. is and has been for most of those 30 years of the ban, the murder capital of the country. Since the US Congress structures the District government, we are currently working in the US House and Senate to get legislation to overturn that ban. This will allow the citizens of the District of Columbia to choose whether they want to own a firearm as mandated by the US Constitution.



**1. March 13, 2006 – NRA Headquarters, Fairfax, Virginia**

Mr. John Smith, the new Director of the Grassroots Division of the NRA, has just been ordered by the Executive Vice-President to come up with a strategy concerning the Washington D.C. gun ban. This strategy will require contacting and mobilizing all NRA members across the country. Mr. Smith has just learned that the *District of Columbia Personal Protection Act* has again been stalled in a Congressional Committee. If it is not voted on soon, it may not make this session of Congress. On his way to work, Mr. Smith heard on the radio that the majority of Washington D.C. residents support the ban as well as does the Mayor and Chief of Police. He begins to think: What are the ramifications in the press if the ban is lifted and murder rates go up substantially? How much of that negative press will be blamed on the NRA? Do members outside crime-filled Washington D.C. really care about this issue? Who are my stakeholders? What are my resources?



Figure 11. Mr. Smith pondering a strategy.

## **2. Creation of the NRA**

Mr. George Wingate and Mr. William Conant started the National Rifle Association (NRA) in 1871. Both men were senior veteran officers of the Union Army during the Civil War. Their personal disgust for the average soldier's marksmanship skills during the war drove them to create an organization that promoted rifle shooting on a scientific basis. Today, the NRA has over four million members. The evolution of the NRA has turned the organization into one of the most powerful lobbying and political organizations within the United States.

### ***a. The First 100 Years***

The NRA started their charter with the promotion of marksmanship and organized shooting matches for training the New York National Guard. The cause quickly interested public officials outside of New York, which gave the NRA the room and support to grow quickly. Soon, other states joined in organizing with the NRA. Various shooting ranges were constructed for the purpose of training and hosting shooting matches.

The Amateur Rifle Club was the first rifle club to be officially affiliated with the NRA. All Amateur Rifle Club members were also NRA members. The Amateur Rifle Club responded to a shooting match invitation by a large and well-established Irish shooting team in 1874. The Amateur Rifle Club had barely over 60 members compared to the thousands of experienced members on the Irish team. With over 8,000 spectators watching in New York, the American team prevailed to victory. The NRA was now widely recognized internationally (Rodengen 25-28).

Throughout the next 100 years, the NRA continued to grow in popularity and shooting competitions soon moved to various universities around the US. Local charters were created and many publications to members became abundant. The NRA also created new programs for youth and women in order to keep membership growing. As a result, membership grew to the tens of thousands. In 1934, the NRA created the Legislative Affairs Division. Even though this division did not officially lobby at this

time, it did keep members informed with newsletters. This allowed members the information to act their own behalf with their local representatives ([www.nrahq.org](http://www.nrahq.org)).

### **3. Creation of Activism**

In 1975, the NRA began to coordinate an official political strategy into the organization with the creation of the Institute of Legislative Action (ILA) or commonly called NRA-ILA. This newly formed political arm of the NRA was to be wholly independent from NRA Headquarters and would only be responsible to the NRA's Board of Directors (Rodengen, 165). Harlon Bronson Carter was the first Executive Director of the NRA-ILA. Mr. Carter's purpose was to communicate the NRA's concerns directly to federal and subsequent state legislatures. With very limited funds, he was able to create a staff that would construct such billets as the Head of Federal Affairs, ILA Deputy Director, and Head of the Grassroots Division. This was not an easy task for Mr. Carter or his applicants. He quoted his applicants with the following, "This is not a job I'm offering—it's an avocation. I want people who would take any loss personally" (Rodengen, 166-167).

Mr. Carter had been part of the NRA organization since 1930, when he joined the NRA at the young age of 16. In 1951, he was elected to the board of directors and served the positions of vice president and president. His straightforward leadership style greatly influenced the organization. He was at times critical of other senior members within the NRA organization feeling that certain senior members lost focus on the NRA's principal goal: protecting the Second Amendment, versus just protecting recreational activities such as hunting and match shooting. This difference in philosophy within the organization would peak in 1977 at the NRA's annual meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio (Sugarman, 47).

The first major test in effectiveness of Mr. Carter's evolving NRA-ILA was almost immediate. In 1975, the NRA-ILA formed a close relationship with U.S. Senator James A. McClure of Idaho. Senator McClure was to serve as the official spokesperson against a bill that would not exempt handgun ammunition under the Hazardous Substances Act. Without the exemption, handgun ammunition sales would be, at best,

restricted, or, at the most extreme, outlawed for sale. Skillful lobbying on the part of the NRA-ILA, Senator McClure included a press conference asking all gun owners across the country to write letters to Congress in opposition to such legislation. Mainstream media responded with mostly negative coverage on Senator McClure's intentions. The results of the press conference and subsequent media coverage caused a reaction that few could have predicted. Some 400 letters were received in support of the proposed ban, while over 300,000 letters were against it. Many of the letters from constituents against the ban also contained anti-ban petitions with thousands of signatures (Rodengen, 168).

The level of grassroots reaction by gun owners and NRA members caused many members of Congress to take immediate notice. The NRA-ILA then began, for the first time, to create mailing lists targeting those particular NRA members who would be most effective in putting pressure on their Congressional representatives. These mailings had a dramatic effect on those particular members of Congress. The pressure subsequently ended with an overwhelming vote in favor of exempting handgun ammunition from the Hazardous Materials Act. Discouraged with the sudden change in legislation, Senator Ted Kennedy from Massachusetts demanded a floor vote. The vote in the U.S. Senate was 75-11 in favor of exempting the handgun ammunition from the Hazardous Substance Act. The overwhelmingly majority surprised many insiders in Washington as well as the mainstream media. Considered the first major victory of the newly formed NRA-ILA, the vote subsequently defined the NRA-ILA as a political heavyweight among Washington lobbying groups (Rodengen, 168-169).

Armed with the major political victory, the NRA-ILA took further steps, urging NRA members to contact and thank their supporting representatives. The victory gave many in Congress the message that the veritable power of the NRA was not located within NRA Headquarters, but within the hearts and minds of the American public. This action led to other more detailed mailings from the NRA-ILA to its members, targeting any proposed legislation that pertained to Second Amendment issues, not only at the federal level, but also at the state and local level.

The goal of the NRA-ILA was simple. When gun control legislation is proposed within any level of government, NRA members were encouraged to respond with letters

and phone calls to their governmental representatives to make their views heard. Furthermore, the political boost in 1975 greatly increased the staff size of the NRA-ILA, which helped facilitate a greater role within the NRA organization. It was the vision of Harlon Carter, some argue, that defined the role of the NRA-ILA through today (Sugarman, 45).

1977 was pivotal year in defining the NRA, its role within American politics, and its future direction. At the annual meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio, often referred to as, “Revolt at Cincinnati,” many members were distraught with the current NRA leadership on many issues. First on the members’ list of concerns was the organization’s leadership culture of changing its focus away from protecting the Second Amendment to focusing on environmental issues and outdoor recreation. Proposed plans to relocate the NRA Headquarters, from Washington D.C. to Colorado, fueled this perception. Many members were left feeling that the NRA had given up the fight where it was needed the most: at the footsteps of the U.S. government. Furthermore, members felt that there were too many financial and political constraints on the newly formed, but proven effective, NRA-ILA (Sugarman, 47-49).

Because of these events, some members organized to create the *Federation for NRA*. Led by Mr. Neal Knox, a popular editor of various firearm magazines, this independent faction of NRA members created an unprecedented rebellion within the organization. On the night of May 21, 1977, the convention center was nearly taken over by the Federation, distinguished from other NRA members by their orange-colored Federation hats. The meetings that night lasted until nearly 4 a.m. with the Federation members being exceedingly vocal over their concerns. The results of the Federation’s rebellion within the NRA organization that night were exceptional (Sugarman, 47-49).

The most notable of these changes included a modification in who determined the powerful position of executive vice president. Before the convention, the Board of Directors determined these positions. Now, they would be determined by voting members. Other modifications included:

- making the protection of the Second Amendment paramount,
- increased funding to the NRA-ILA,

- more member participation in the selection of Board members,
- a reversal on the decision to move NRA Headquarters to Colorado
- a decision that future bylaws could only be changed by a member vote.

Furthermore, with a tremendous political victory still in the minds of many members, and through the cheers of the crowd late that night, Mr. Harlon Carter was elected the NRA's new leader (Sugarman, 50-51).

As NRA political victories continued to grow, so did the NRA's influence. In 1986, through the support of a few strong and influential supporters in Congress, the NRA was able to get the McClure-Volkner Firearms Owners Protection Act passed. The act had been seven years in the making. However, since anti-gun legislators controlled the leadership in the powerful House Judiciary Committee, the bill was never brought up to a floor vote. With the help of an intensive lobbying effort by the NRA-ILA, the U.S. Senate was able to bypass the Judiciary Committee, by using a discharge petition. The petition allowed the bill to be bypassed by the Judiciary Committee and brought up for a full floor vote. Within the House of Representatives, 218 members voted for the petition, enough for a floor vote. The floor vote was 292–130 in favor of the bill, an overwhelming landmark victory for the NRA. This was only the eighth time since 1960 that a petition was successfully enacted in Congress. “The McClure-Volkner Law was undoubtedly ILA's finest moment,” said James O. E. Norrel, NRA-ILA's first communications director (Rodengen 219-220).

Response to the McClure-Volkner Firearms Owners Protection Act was immediate and profound. It gave pro-gun state legislatures the momentum to enact other forms of pro-gun legislation at many state levels. The trend was certain, consistent, and real. The NRA was soundly imbedded into the very fabric of American politics at all levels of government. The passage, however, did not come without a fight in other areas of the public discourse. Many city police departments were against the ban; some joined forces with anti-gun groups. This was a change for the NRA, which had enjoyed the overwhelmingly support of many police agencies, and they challenged these specific officers with the full force of their political strength. Jerald Vaughn, a 20-year police

veteran and executive director of a prominent police organization, decided to work with Handgun Control Inc, an anti-gun lobbying group (Sugarman, 62). Officer Vaughn describes his experiences:

I was identified by the NRA for a period of time as public enemy number one. Along with that came a certain amount of hate mail and controversy. The tactics, the vindictiveness, the resources mustered against anyone who dares speak against them...no other group can compare to the NRA (Sugarman, 62).

With the election of William Jefferson Clinton to become the 42<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States in 1992, the NRA had a new challenge on the horizon. President Clinton quickly supported anti-gun lobbying groups from the very beginning of his first year as President (Rodengen, 248). The most prominent of these anti-gun lobbying groups was Handgun Control Inc., chaired by Sarah Brady, wife of Jim Brady. Mr. Brady served as a White House Press Secretary for President Ronald Reagan and was severely wounded during John Hinckley's assassination attempt on President Reagan on March 30, 1981 ([www.bradycampaign.org](http://www.bradycampaign.org)).

Mrs. Brady, with the help of Mr. Brady, was an effective leader for Handgun Control Inc. The organization sought to impose large restrictions on many different types of firearms. Intense lobbying on the part of Handgun Control Inc. ensued after the election of President Clinton, especially since they thought there was a friendly anti-gun President in the White House. The largest piece of legislation pushed by Handgun Control Inc. was the Brady Bill, named after Mr. Brady. The intense lobbying efforts by Handgun Control Inc. resulted in the passage of the Brady Bill on November 30, 1993. Subsequently signed into law by President Clinton, this was the first large occurrence of anti-firearm legislation passed into law since 1968 ([www.saf.org](http://www.saf.org)). The NRA viewed the passage as a sounding defeat. While the Brady Bill had been debated on the floor in Congress since 1987, intense NRA lobbying efforts, and political divide between proponents and opponents had stalled its passage year after year.

In response to the passage of the Brady Bill, the NRA began to restructure its organizational strategy, hoping to dispel the merits of the Brady Bill. The NRA tried to

purchase airtime to present a commercial that outlined criminals, not firearms, as the real reason for violent crime in the U.S. Major media outlets, like CBS, refused to show such a commercial, stating that it was their decision not to air such material. The NRA had felt that there was a media bias before, but this brought it to a completely new level (Rodengen, 249). The NRA began to reenergize the grass roots efforts of its membership. Mr. LaPierre pronounced, “You are going to see a revolution,” referring to the upcoming national elections in November of 1994. NRA President, Mr. Thomas L. Washington, was quoted in 1994:

After winning their Brady Bill waiting period and recent bans on semi-automatic magazines, the anti-gun lobby is telling politicians that gun owners are no longer a threat. They claim you don’t care enough about your rights to vote, so politicians shouldn’t care about the Second Amendment. And if you don’t prove them wrong November 8, rest assured that’s all you have left” (Rodengen, 251).

Due to the extreme loss on the Brady Bill, the NRA refocused all of its efforts into changing the political landscape with the upcoming 1994 national elections. The entire organization renewed its energy, trying to reach as many members and gun owners as possible. Despite a massive grass roots effort, very few major media outlets reported on it. The efforts of the NRA were unnoticed outside the organization and other like-minded gun lobbying groups. Mr. LaPierre also released his book, *Crime, Guns and Freedom*, which addressed every debate over the Brady Bill. The book quickly made the New York Times bestseller list (Rodengen, 252).

Prior to the 1994 election, the NRA compiled a list of twenty-four Congressional members that, they decided, should be removed from office because of their vote concerning the Brady Bill. The results of the November 8, 1994, elections were unforeseen by even the most experienced of political pundits within Washington D.C. Nineteen of those twenty-four selected Congressional members were defeated that night. This was an astounding number of incumbents to lose in a single election. Never before in U.S. history, has a lobbying group affected the outcome of a National election more than the NRA did in November of 1994. As reported by *The Hill*, a Washington D.C. political publication, “As candidates who backed gun control legislation fell one by one



across the nation Tuesday night, the National Rifle Association re-emerged as a high-caliber force that politicians cross at their own peril.” *The Washington Post* reported, “After suffering big defeats in Congress this year on handgun control and a ban on certain assault weapons, the National Rifle Association made good on its promise not to get mad, but to get even.” (Rodengen, 253). Furthermore as stated in President Clinton’s book *My Life*.

On November 8, 1994, we got the living daylights beat out of us, losing eight Senate races and fifty-four House seats, the largest defeat for our party since 1946. The NRA had a great night. They beat both Speaker Tom Foley and Jack Brooks, two of the ablest members of Congress, who had warned me this would happen. Foley was the first Speaker to be defeated in more than a century. Jack Brooks had supported the NRA for years and had led the fight against the assault weapons ban in the House, but as chairman of the Judiciary Committee he had voted for the overall crime bill even after the ban was put into it. The NRA was an unforgiving master: one strike and you’re out. The gun lobby claimed to have defeated nineteen of the twenty-four members on its hit list. They did at least that much damage.... (President William Jefferson Clinton, 629-630)

## **B. TACTICS**

For the NRA to remain vibrant and effective there needs to be active participation among its members. Therefore, the NRA has taken steps to adjust its strategy into constantly reaching members that are more non-traditional. Aside from the traditional programs, there are various other programs offered by the NRA that give many non-traditional members many opportunities to participate. This is an effective way to exploit the NRA’s resources by expanding its membership base to different areas of American society. These programs also combat negative stereotypes that the NRA is an all white male organization.

### **1. Women of the NRA**

Currently the NRA has over four million total members and is continually exploring ways to expand the face of its membership. Traditionally, white adult males

have made up the vast majority of officials and members and therefore been criticized by many in the elite media for being a “good old boys” club. The NRA has attempted to counter this claim with some key strategic decisions not through words, but through actions. The NRA’s current President is Susan Froman. Ms. Froman is the second woman and first Jewish NRA President.

The NRA has also made women’s programs an important priority within the organization. *Women on Target* is a program designed for women in order to allow them more hunting and shooting opportunities. According to the NRA, there are about two million women who hunt and an additional four million who enjoy target shooting. Past research by the NRA shows that these numbers of women participating in these sports are steadily increasing. This program aids women with lessons in shooting and hunting skills in a women-only environment. *Refuse to be a Victim* is another program that teaches women about the dangers of crime and proactive safety measures that can help prevent it. The program does not require NRA membership ([www.nrahq.org](http://www.nrahq.org)).

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The NRA has often been the center of criticism for when young children die due to an accidental shooting in the home. This was a large cultural topic in Michael Moore’s award winning documentary movie, *Bowling for Columbine*. The movie brought vast public awareness to the problem and indirectly blamed the NRA as one of the reasons for it. The NRA reacted to such negativity by pointing out the many programs in firearm education for youths and young children. One of the more popular programs is the *Eddie Eagle* program. This program teaches children in pre-K through third grade important lessons in encountering a firearm. The NRA offers instructional videos and study aids to schools at little or no cost. None of the *Eddie Eagle* program materials ever shows a firearm. The purpose of the program is to stop the number of accidental shootings involving young children. To date, the program has reached 18 million children ([www.nrahq.org](http://www.nrahq.org)).

The NRA has also put a large amount of resources particularly behind young adult programs. These programs offer shooting matches, essay contests and hunter education courses that are specifically for young adults. *InSights* magazine is a monthly publication specifically for NRA youth members. This magazine gives up to date information on shooting matches and other special events that junior NRA members can participate. The NRA also affiliates with many other youth organizations to include the Boy Scouts, 4-H clubs and many commercial summer camps ([www.nrahq.org](http://www.nrahq.org)).

### **3. Law Enforcement**

The NRA has had an official relationship with US law enforcement agencies since the 1960s. The relationship usually consists of the NRA offering various firearm-training courses to law enforcement agencies for little or no cost. Annually, the NRA hosts a *National Police Shooting Championship*, which attracts law enforcement agencies from around the world to compete. The NRA also gives many awards to officers, which is to include the highly distinguished *Officer of the Year* award. This close relationship gives the NRA an added tool to use in promoting the safe use of firearms. The NRA has often been the center of controversy concerning firearms and violent criminals. This relationship with law enforcement has had a positive impact for the NRA when the organization needed law enforcement spokespeople to speak on their behalf.

### **4. Election Volunteer Coordinators**

The continued training of the Election Volunteer Coordinators (EVC) gives the NRA a diverse source of influence by coordinating local election meetings throughout most of the Congressional districts in the US. This method also allows ECVs to create and organize a platform for other NRA members to participate on behalf of the organization. This tactic allows the NRA to have a human face outside of NRA Headquarters in Fairfax, Virginia. Furthermore, it gives the NRA the ability to handle almost every issue with state and local level constituents. According to Mr. Caroline, this

is the most important element that makes the NRA vastly different from all the other organizations of its size: one on one communication.

## **5. Hunter Programs**

The NRA sees hunting programs as a way to expand its influence outside of normal gun owners. This tactic allows the NRA to gain greater influence with the 17 million hunters currently in the US. As a result, this allows the NRA greater opportunities for new memberships and the ability to expand its base of support. The NRA also provides information for hunter education courses. As outlined in the interview with Mr. Caroline:

Interviewer – Does the NRA address other issues that may be related but are outside the scope of the Second Amendment? You brought up public access for hunting earlier.

Mr. Caroline – Absolutely, that specific issue is a huge component of what we in the Institute for Legislative Action do. Whether it is making sure that public lands are accessible and open or reducing red tape or what we are calling “No net loss land.” Where for every acre that the government shuts down to no hunting they have to open up another acre of hunting land so there is no “net loss” of hunting land and access. We have specific staff and departments where all they do is monitor those types of threats to hunters and hunting. To ensure that hunters have access to public lands and that hunting regulations are not so restrictive as to discriminate against hunters that want to go into the field. We have a Hunters Services Division, Conservation and Wildlife Division and a Legislative Hunting Division. We also provide a magazine just for hunters, safety courses as well as a NRA hunt club program. Protecting hunters’ rights and access is a major day-to-day component of what we try to accomplish here.

## **6. Successful Diversification**

Because of these programs, the NRA has been able to expand, not only the number of its members, but also its diversity. This may partly explain why the NRA has

had unparalleled success in the last ten years. Not only do these programs give the NRA a better public relation image, but it also helps silence their most staunch critics who echo that they are an all male organization. The NRA does not seem to be slowing down in creating new initiatives for all members of society to participate in. This continued trend will surely only add more influence to the organization.

### **C. MEDIA**

Past studies have overwhelmingly proven that the NRA has had far more negative press coverage than any other comparable social organization of its size. Because the NRA is so well organized, with millions of members one would feel that it would receive vast amounts of positive media reports. According to many past and present senior NRA officials as well as organizations that study the media, this is not the case. Negative media plays a very important role in how the NRA creates its communicative strategy with its members and the public. Negative coverage allows the NRA to accuse what they call “the out of touch biased elite media” with undermining the Second Amendment rights of the American public.

The NRA confronts this perceived threat by labeling these elite media sources as strictly biased and focused towards an anti-gun platform. The NRA creates its own media campaign that distributes millions of pieces of literature that points out the clear disparities in the media. The NRA also directly relates the negative media coverage to a threat on the Second Amendment. This threat mobilizes more members to join or have sympathetic supporters act of their behalf. A good example would be the Columbine school shootings in Colorado. Even when the NRA was receiving the harshest negative press than at any other time in the 1990s, memberships went up substantially (Patrick 135-144).

#### **D. FUTURE OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PERSONAL PROTECTION ACT**

Representative Mark E. Souder, R-Indiana, leads the *District of Columbia Personal Protection Act* in the House of Representatives. The bill, if passed in its current form, would lead to the following changes:

- Overturn the handgun ban
- Cancel penalties for possessing a handgun in a home or business
- Dispose of penalties for the possession of unregistered firearms
- Do away with registration requirements for ammunition and other firearms
- End a ban against various semiautomatic rifles
- Not allow city officials to enact any further gun bans

During the mid 1970's the District of Columbia was approved for a Home Rule charter, which allowed it to govern activities within the District. In 1976, in order to help stop rampant gun violence, District officials enacted the gun ban. Studies show that while the rest of the country crime rate had risen by 12% from 1976 to 2006, crime within the District during the same timeframe had risen over 200% ([www.newsmax.com](http://www.newsmax.com)).

The NRA has steadily claimed that the gun ban has actually increased the ability for criminals to commit more crimes on an unarmed and defenseless public. This leads to the explanation for the dramatic increase in crime. On the other hand, District of Columbia officials, including Mayor Anthony Williams still claim that the gun ban would further add to the District's rampant crime problem. They state that the guns used for criminal activity within the District are mostly brought in from neighboring states of Virginia and Maryland. Currently there is no system to stop this type of trafficking into the District of Columbia.

Representative Souder and other proponents claim that the law ending the ban is not supposed to infringe on the Home Rule charter but District of Columbia officials and residents see it differently. The District's residents highly support the gun ban. The NRA sees the issue as a Constitutional right that is afforded to every law-abiding American and

therefore are vehemently lobbying for the gun ban removal. Currently, The District of Columbia is the only city in the U.S. that prohibits keeping firearms at home for self-defense against a criminal attack. San Francisco also just recently passed a law but not nearly as restrictive as the one in the District of Columbia.

The *District of Columbia Personal Protection Act* will continue to be a very divisive topic for its stakeholders. The issues of self-rule, Constitutional rights, crime and public protection will certainly be at the forefront of debate. The NRA sees the issue as one of there highest priorities. Since the decision is going to be determined by Congress, the NRA has lobbied heavily to NRA members both inside and outside of the District of Columbia for support. This allows the NRA to be able to draw from its base of over four million members.

Mr. Smith sat in his chair as he sipped his morning coffee, “What exactly should I recommend?”

**E. CASE STUDY APPENDIX**

Rank 2001	Organization
1	NRA
2	AARP
3	National Federation of independent Business
4	American Israel Public Affairs Committee
5	Association of Trial Lawyers
6	AFL-CIO
7	Chamber of Commerce
8	National Beer Wholesalers Association
9	National Association of Realtors
10	National Association of Manufacturers
11	National Association of Home Builders
12	American Medical Association
13	American Hospital Association
14	National Education Association
15	American Farm Bureau Federation
16	Motion Picture Association of America
17	National Association of Broadcasters
18	National Right to Life Committee
19	Health Insurance Association
20	National Restaurant Association
21	National Governors Association
22	Recording Industry Association
23	American Bankers Association
24	Pharmaceutical Research & Manufacturers
25	International Brotherhood of Teamsters

Table 2. Fortune Magazine's 2001 Power 25





Figure 12. Susan Froman, current NRA President



Figure 13. Alaska Congressman Don Young, who is also an NRA Board member, wades through more than 200,000 postcards received by his House Resources Committee from NRA members protesting abuses by the Clinton-Gore Administration.

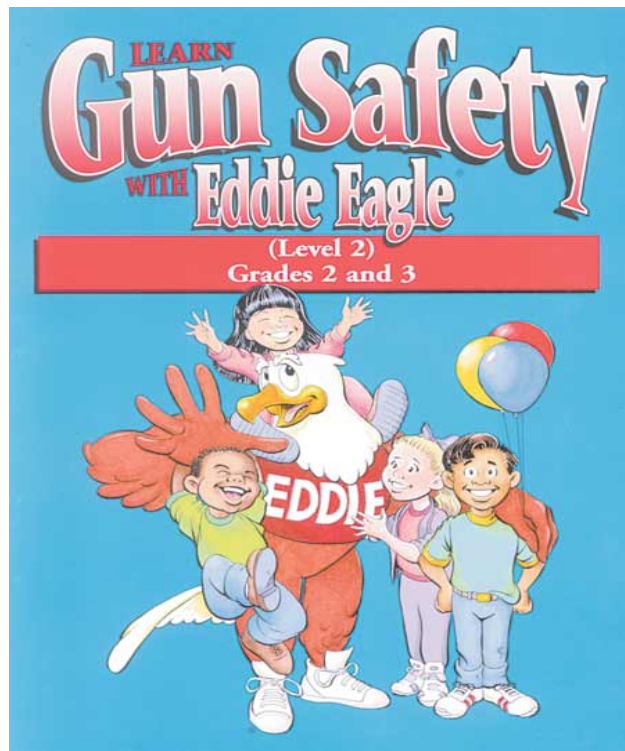


Figure 14. Eddie Eagle Safety Book



Figure 15. Eddie Eagle teaching young children about gun safety



Figure 16. NRA displays political ambitions



Figure 17. NRA Headquarters- Fairfax, Virginia

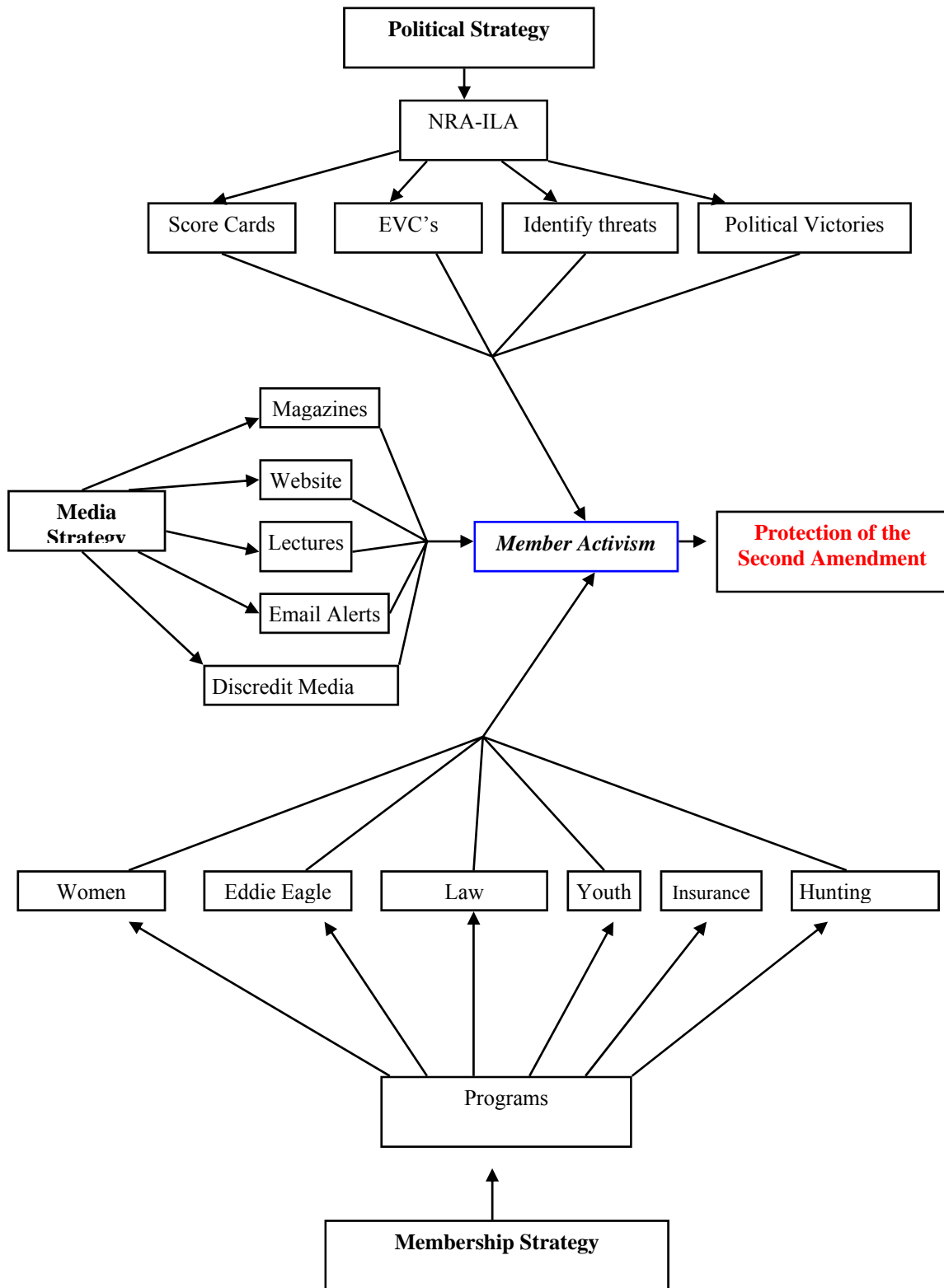


Figure 18. NRA Strategy Flowchart

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